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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[A LOST OPPORTUNITY.]

THE LOST STAR.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN Ruby went up to her room that evening she found a handsome dress of Spanish lace and black satin laid upon her bed. A piece of paper was pinned to it, with some writing upon it. Taking it to the light she read, "With May's love. A small amends for the disaster of Christmas Eve."

A flush of pain and pleasure rose to her cheeks. It was rather bitter to change from the giver into the receiver of homely additions to the toilette, but at the same time it saved her from the mortification of having to appear amongst the well-dressed throng downstairs in a simple grenadine; and she thoroughly appreciated the delicacy of feeling which caused the gift to come from a child, when it had, no doubt, been paid for by her mother.

As she dressed herself in it for the evening, she looked at her own reflection with pardonable pride. In fancy she went back to her own home, and felt her dear mother's fond eyes

resting upon her once more, whilst her father, after examining her critically through his double eye-glasses, murmured, "Pon my word, the dead image of her mother!" which was the highest praise he could accord to any woman.

As Ruby entered the drawing-room, she noticed a striking-looking stranger amongst the group of ladies round the fireplace. It was Miss Deyncourt, who had arrived just before dinner, with the intention of spending a week at the Chase; but on hearing that Lord Alverley intended to leave on the Monday, she suddenly recollected an engagement which forced her to be in town on the same day. She had dark hair, arranged in a fashion of her own at the top of her head, and a fringe which almost hid the sweep of her eyebrows. Her eyes were large, but expressionless; her nose a trifle too long for perfect symmetry; her mouth broad, but well-shaped, and when her full lips parted, they disclosed a row of white and even teeth. She was tall, with a long neck, broad shoulders, and magnificent bust, and her figure was shown off to full advantage by a black velvet, which clung round her limbs

like a shroud. There were no excrescences of lace or jet to take off the severity of this garment, which was confined round the waist by a gold band with a diamond clasp, matching the coronet in her hair, and the dazzling neck-lace round her throat.

Lord Alverley was lying on the sofa looking more dead than alive, but the ends of his monstaches quivered with a smile as Ruby came into the room. Presently Miss Deyncourt, after a cool stare at her, detached herself from the other ladies, and sat down on a low chair by the Viscount's side.

The rest of the gentlemen sauntered in as Ruby, with a slight blush, had just finished her speech of thanks to the Countess, who smiled on her graciously, and said she was glad to see the dress was so becoming.

There was a pause in the buzz of conversation, such as often occurs in a crowded room, and Miss Deyncourt's harsh voice broke the silence.

"Is that faded-looking girl who is so ridiculously overdressed your sisters' governess?"

"No!" said Alverley, promptly. "Miss St.

Heller is standing by my mother, and is looking even better than usual to-night."

"That's the very girl I mean; and I say that it is a shame for her to dress like that as a nursery-governess. Stuff and nonsense! In these levelling days I delight in doing my best to keep such people in their proper place."

"A laudable undertaking," he said, slowly; "but it would be awkward, after all, to make a mistake as to the proper place. Did you ever happen to come across Sir Robert St. Heliers?"

"Certainly I did. He was very good to my father at the time of the elections, and I remember staying at the Mount—a perfect paradise—when I was about the height of your walking-stick."

"This is his daughter. So you see what a mistake you might have made," and he smiled at the change in her face. "as you would never have guessed that her proper place was Paradise."

"The daughter of Sir Robert Heliers—the proudest man in the county!" she exclaimed, with something like a gasp. "Good Heavens, how the mighty are fallen!"

"Yes, it is shamefully hard for her, but uncommonly fortunate for my sisters. I only wish I were a little girl in pinafore."

"When you are, I will come and teach you myself," with a kindly nod.

"Thanks; but you would make me nervous. I couldn't say my dialogues to an individual in serge or brown-holland, and of course you would dress down to the position."

"Perhaps not. I might follow the example set by Miss St. Heliers."

"You might do worse. She knows how to efface herself with dignity, and appear without embarrassment just when she is wanted. A capital virtue in a woman."

"Have you lost your heart?" with a swift glance into his eyes.

"You know I had none to lose. My mother thinks very highly of her, and, of course, I am entirely guided by her opinion. How am I to form one of my own, when we are separated as the two poles?"

"True. I don't suppose you ever meet except in the evening, like this?"

"How should we? She is always with her pupils, and I have been a prisoner in my own bed-room. Ah! why did you not come before to nurse me?"

She looked down on him with a gratified smile.

"Ah! why, indeed? You ought to have sent for me."

"If I had thought you would come!" with a look over his shoulder to see if no one was disposed to come and save him from a laborious flirtation.

Ruby, looking unusually white and nervous, had just taken her place on the music-stool, where she was slowly drawing off her gloves. There was no one by her to turn over her leaves or support her in any way in that room full of strangers; and sorely wounded by the remarks she had overheard, it was evident to anyone who took the trouble to look into her face that it was with difficulty that she could maintain her composure.

"What a shame!" muttered Alverley, as he listened with some anxiety for the first notes.

They were not as clear as usual, and there was a slight hesitation when the bottom of the page was reached and it had to be turned over. She had just accomplished it when she heard a slight commotion; a chair was pushed back hurriedly, a sofa created, and presently a coat-sleeve was stretched out to perform that office for her. Without looking up she recognized the hand whitened by illness, and, overwhelmed by the thought of the invalid exerting himself so far on her behalf, she nearly lost her place.

"Sing your best," he whispered, "it may be long before I hear you again."

Encouraged by his sympathy and interest her voice recovered its purity, and ringing out in full sweetness through the room enforced silence on the most talkative among the

crowd. Her heart swelled with triumph, as she compelled the sneer to vanish from Miss Deyncourt's face, and a murmur of applause rose on every side.

"Thank you," she said, simply to Lord Alverley; but for a moment their eyes met, and seemed to tell so much, that he at least sank hurriedly on to the sofa, whilst he went back to his sofa, wondering if there were anything in life so sweet as this friendship "under the cross."

"Harold, how could you let your brother disturb himself, when he looks as if it were almost too much exertion to open his lips?"

"My dear mother!" and he shrugged his shoulders with an air of indifference. "You ought to know by this time, that Alverley is always strong enough to do what he wishes, and weak enough to be able to avoid what he doesn't like."

"That has nothing to do with the present case. When poor Miss St. Heliers was left to turn over her own leaves, and common charity compelled him to do it, as you would not stir." Then the Countess turned away with an expression of severity on her usually placid countenance, and Harold smiled to think how blind she was!

Miss Deyncourt's eyes, on the contrary, were wide open, and with a scornful glance at Ruby, who was standing at a little distance talking to an old lady, she remarked, in a loud whisper, "I really think that if I practised every day, as I suppose she is obliged to do to keep up her music, I should be thoroughly accustomed by this time to turning over my own pages."

A look flashed from Alverley's eyes, that might have warned her not to go too far; but he only remarked, in his sleepiest manner, "How fortunate it is for me that all women are not so independent as Miss Deyncourt."

"For my own part, I detest affectation," she said, with heightened colour.

"Do you? I rather amuse me whenever I come across it, which is not very often in these days. It strikes me as no very kind in a woman to take so much trouble to please me."

"Oh! very kind, when they do it for their own sake instead of yours; but I know you only say it to disagree with me."

"What can be further from my thoughts or wishes?"

"Anything. Is Captain Marston going to marry your sister?"

"If he consults me, I shall say 'don't.'"

"But is he thinking of it?"

"He's not quite a fool, and he knows that Clem has a temper of her own."

"Most women have."

"Possibly; but it is not my experience of them. Won't you sing us a song?"

"No, for I don't want you to disturb yourself again."

"Oh! Harold is close by, and will be delighted."

"Thank you. You could do it for Miss St. Heliers, but not for me," and with her head held high in the air she walked away.

Ruby meanwhile, with every pulse in her body quivering with indignation, had hidden herself in the conservatory. She had never met with such rudeness before, and the humiliation was almost more than she could bear. She had schooled herself to meet the unpleasantness of her present position with calm resignation; but she could not submit with patience to being insulted by an adversary, who took care to give her no chance of reply. As she paced up and down amongst the gorgeous flowers she felt so utterly miserable that it was with difficulty that she could keep the tears from running down her cheeks.

Alone in that great house with no one to take her part (for she had not heard Lord Alverley's answer), a wild longing came over her for the sound of Violet's voice, the loving touch of her arms. She would have given anything to be able to throw herself upon her neck, and be kissed and patted into recovered self-respect; but there was not a soul to whom she could

turn in this semiprecious of a age, for the women were all against her (she forgot the Countess), and the men were out of the question. Even Harold Jerningham, who was so kind to her on the journey down that she was "decided into the belief that he would be her staunch friend through good report and ill, had grown so cold and stern in his manner that

she ceased to look to him for counsel or support; and Captain Marston had changed his tactics so completely, that instead of forcing his distasteful friendship upon her, he had not taken the slightest notice of her during the course of the evening.

To be taken up one day and forgotten the next is a disagreeable experience through which "the needy gentlewoman" has too often to pass, and it requires an immense amount of philosophy to enable the sufferer to bear it with any patience. Ruby was new to the experience, and therefore suffered acutely.

Bending over the fragrant blossom of a Cape jessamine, she came to the conclusion that it would be better—far better—to confine herself exclusively to the children's society in the schoolroom, than to expose herself to fresh humiliations from any chance guest who had neither the good breeding nor good feeling to treat her with proper respect. The old life had gone for ever; she no longer belonged to the world of fashion and pleasure, and it was little joy to look on at it as a spectator, and be forgotten in a crowd. She was so engrossed in her bitter reflections that she failed to hear the steps which were coming nearer and nearer.

Harold stopped to admire the pose of the greatest figure before he spoke. The dejection, so plainly written on the downcast face, moved his kinder heart with true compassion.

"We were beginning to be afraid that you had retired to bed with a headache till I caught a glimpse of your dress amongst the flowers."

At the sound of his voice she looked up like a startled bird.

"My head is all right, thank you."

"Then you will come and sing us another song?"

She shook her head and bent it again, as if in anxious examination of a particular blossom.

"We have just been suffering tortures from a duet performed by the two Miss Simpsons, and my father said, 'Bahl! it was worse than a dose of medicine. For Heaven's sake, ask Miss St. Heliers to come and take the taste out of our mouths!'"

Ruby did not laugh, as he had meant her to; and there was a silence, during which she picked a green leaf and twisted it in her fingers.

Determined to win her back to her usual stunniness, he placed himself in front of her, and looked down into her face with his pleasant smile.

"You will not be so unkind as to refuse?"

"I cannot sing to-night, believe me, Mr. Jerningham. If I tried I should break down."

The soft eyes were raised to his for a moment, and he saw that they were full of tears.

In an instant the barrier of reserve that jealous suspicion and hurt feelings had raised between them nearly gave way, but he recollected that his brother was her chosen champion, and his own services were *de trop*, so only answered gravely,—

"I have to apologise, I know, for the rudeness of one of our guests; but as she was promptly answered and set down, I don't see why you should take it to heart."

"I did not hear the answer; I thought no one took my part."

"When Alverley was in the room—was it likely?"

"You were silent," she said with burning cheeks.

"Yes. There was no occasion for me to speak when my brother made your cause his own," with a significant glance.

"Lord Alverley, like a true gentleman, objects to seeing a woman trampled on. He was kind to me, and I am very grateful," and she raised her eyes fearlessly.

"Women are always fond of him," he said, with a scornful smile; "but he is apt to get into disgrace with husbands, brothers, and friends."

"And have no husband, no brother, and no friend, he can take such few opportunities as lie in his way of doing a kindness to me without fear. There is no one to object to his interference."

"Is it not rather rash to talk like that?"

"Rash! I don't know! Perhaps if Miss Deyncourt stays here much longer I may grow rasher still!" Her face was white; her lips quivered; but, in spite of her wild words, she still looked serene and refined, that his heart bled for her.

"I would not let a heartless woman like Miss Deyncourt have such an influence over me! I would not give her the triumph of seeing she could upset me by a word."

"It is very well for you who speak from the vantage ground of a good position!" she exclaimed, her heart swelling with bitterness; "but for me—utterly defenceless—and thrust down in the dust, every hit tells."

"Do you think I don't feel it?" in a voice hoarse with suppressed feeling.

"I thought you did once, but not now," and her head drooped sadly.

"Why not now?" unreasonably angered at the consequences of his own conduct.

"You have been angry with me for some reason or other—I have often wondered why?"

"Angry with you! Oh! dear, no! Of course, you had a right to choose your own friends, and if you think Marston and Alverley more to be depended on than myself," with a shrug of his shoulders, "why, I can't help it, though I think you most unwise!"

"Captain Marston is no friend of mine, although, as we walked home together from the decorations, he begged for peace instead of war, and I could not refuse it with the words of the Christmas-hymn ringing in my ears. But had you not better go back to your guests?"

"Will you say the name of Alverley?" he said, eagerly ignoring the last suggestion, and fixing his eyes upon her face as if he would force the truth from her expression, if not from her words.

And as he looked a wave of crimson, which she would have given anything on earth to suppress, mounted slowly over the softness of her cheeks to the low, broad brow.

He bit his lip and turned on his heel.

"Stay!" she cried; "you have not waited for an answer!"

He looked back over his shoulder, his handsome face stern and set. "Your cheeks have answered for you!"

Then he walked away between the rows of tall camellias and left her looking after him, with an expression of pain and infinite longing on her lovely features—pain that no doctor's hand could ever cure—and longing, such as grows like the thirst of the desert in the soul of the disappointed, when the prize that was wished for vanishes for ever out of sight.

CHAPTER XVII.

On Sunday afternoon the frost broke up, and the heavy clouds which had hung over the hills through the morning, and seemed to be charged with abundance of snow, discharged themselves, on the contrary, in a storm of rain. The men of the party, with the exception of Lord Alverley and one or two others who stayed to keep him company, dawdled about the stables, trying to kill time as best they could with discussions over the rival merits of the horses, or the jadedness of the various entries in their betting-books; whilst the ladies yawned over the fire in the drawing-room, longing for the advent of a visitor, or anything else, that could break the deadly monotony of the slowly passing hours.

Even Ruby St. Heliers decided it was impossible to go to church; so, after reading the service with the children, she sat down at the piano, and in the glorious music of Mozart found a panacea for the troubles and tangles

of life. Soothed as if by a voice from an angel's mouth, she regained her wonted cheerful spirit.

The children sat in the firelight on the hearth, playing with some elaborate puzzle supposed to represent the intricacies of the Garden of Eden; but they stopped every now and then to listen to the music, with a look of awe on their pretty faces.

"Come, and let us sing a carol together," said Ruby, cheerfully; and turning round to the piano she played the first notes of one they all knew, "Earthly friends may fail and falter." The children had sweet voices, and a very good idea of time, so that their childish troubles blended very well with Ruby's richer notes.

There was a group of people muffled in ulsters gathered under the window unknown to those inside, and gradually those who knew the words joined in the carol till there was quite a chorus of voices outside in the rain. The children were delighted, and insisted upon having another. They grew so excited as to refrain from down below that it was only Ruby's calm gravity which kept them at all to the time; and when it was finished, she closed the piano decidedly, and refused to play any more.

Then there was a sound of footsteps on the soaking gravel, followed by a silence; and Ruby with a sigh of relief sat down on the hearth-rug, with a child on either side of her, and began the story of an Eastern king, which whiled away the time so nicely that tea came a great deal too soon.

Anna, the schoolroom-maid—a good-looking girl with rather a Jewish cast of countenance—drew the curtains, lighted the lamp, and laid the cloth, all with a sullen air of gloom as if she were doing it under protest. Ruby rarely spoke to her, for she generally contrived to make her short answers as uncivil as she could, without being exactly insulting; and to quarrel with a servant was obnoxious to her disposition.

As she sat down at the head of the table she was annoyed to perceive a small note, the corner of which protruded from under her plate. It must have been put there by Anna, and instinct told her at once that it could come from nobody but Lord Alverley. Indignant at the idea that he should dare to write to her, and send the note by the hand of a servant in this surreptitious manner, she crushed her plate down upon it as if it had been some disgusting insect, and, burning with anger, took up the teapot with shaky fingers.

Her cheeks were crimson, her eyes flashed fire; and May, who happened to look up at her as she was helping herself to a piece of cake, dropped the knife with a loud clatter, thinking that she was going to be scolded; but tea was over, and the scolding never came, so she ran away, followed by Beatrice, to be made tidy for the drawing-room.

When she was alone Ruby opened the letter, still with the same expression of disgust and anger on her face. It ran thus:—

"If the children had not stuck to you like a pair of leeches I should have asked for an interview this afternoon. By this time tomorrow I shall be gone, but let the serpentine remind you that you have a friend in London, who will be by your side in a moment, directly he is sent for—St. James's-street, will always find me. Never think yourself forgotten or slighted, even when odious creatures insult you, and I am constrained to say only a thousandth part of what I mean. Don't forget me, Ruby.—Yours most devotedly and respectfully,

"ALVERLEY."

She tore it into a hundred shreds and threw them into the fire. Then she rang the bell. The only word for which she was grateful in the short effusion was the "respectfully" at the end, but even that roused her scorn. "Much respect he has shown me," she murmured, with flashing eyes. "Compromising me in the eyes of a girl like that. Never trouble yourself to act the part of post-man again," she said, slowly and distinctly,

as the schoolroom-maid appeared in answer to her summons, and began to clear away the tea. "Letters that cannot come by the usual way through the post-bag are wrongly addressed to me, and will only be thrown into the fire."

"I did as I was told," and her sullen face looked more clouded than ever. "You can throw it away afterwards, if you don't want to keep it!"

"Of course I can throw them away; but I don't choose to have them brought to me at all. See that it never occurs again," and with her head thrown back proudly, she walked out of the room.

The girl looked after her with an evil light in her eyes. "Your airs and graces won't go down with me. Them as takes walks in the garden when all the others are out of the way—them as talks for hours in a parlour a-firting and a-going on shameful, don't want letters! Oh, no! not at all. It's well to throw them into the fire, cos burnt ashes tell no tales, and they haven't been read first—no, of course they haven't! And he so ill too, with his poor knees knocking together, looking like a white 'ollock with the stalk split in half. If he had but a-written one line to me, I'd have stuck it in my prayer-book, and kept it for ever and a day. But since this party-faced governess has been in the house, he takes no more notice of me than if I were the mat under his feet!" With a prodigious sigh she whisked the white tablecloth off the table, folded it up neatly in spite of her agitation, and, taking up the tray, departed.

"So Miss St. Heliers does not give us the benefit of her society on Sunday evenings," said Imogen Deyncourt, as she lounged at her ease in a large arm-chair, with her well-shaped feet, in elaborately embroidered high-heeled shoes, stretched out on a stool, and exhibited to the public for nothing.

"She does generally, but she evidently thinks that there is some unhallowed element amongst us to-day, for she has not allowed us a glimpse of her face, except in the pew in church."

"What do you mean by that, Captain Marston? Am I the element in question?" looking full in his face, with her large eyes.

"I never said so! Two suns you know can never reign in the same sphere."

"I certainly don't want to be in the same as Miss St. Heliers."

"Perhaps you would like to be a comet—dash into her when least expected, and produce spontaneous combustion."

"If she got in my way—otherwise I would rather leave her alone."

"How magnanimous!" murmured Lord Alverley. "There is nothing so generous as a woman."

"By-the-by, what was that noise that I heard in the garden this afternoon, just as I was coming down stairs for five o'clock tea?"

"Noise!" echoed Harold, in pretended indignation. "That is how she describes a concert worthy of the Albert Hall at least!"

"So you were there too?" looking at him with some curiosity. "And what was it all about? I thought Moody and Sankey were in possession, or that the Salvation Army was loose in the park!"

"I wonder you didn't come out to see!"

"On the contrary, I felt inclined to hide myself in the cellar."

"My dear Miss Deyncourt, please explain to what you are alluding," exclaimed the Countess, in great perplexity; "I am quite in the dark."

"And so am I. Captain Marston could tell us, but he won't."

Thus appealed to he leant forward, with a malicious gleam in his eyes, conscious that Alverley was on the alert, and dying to know what had really happened, though he preserved an appearance of sleepy indifference.

"As we were coming through the garden, on our way from the stables, we heard what sounded like a choir of angels just above our heads, and naturally stopped still to listen."

"I shouldn't have thought that was in your line," said Miss Deyncourt, contemptuously.

"See how you misjudged me! It was so much in my line that I could not restrain myself from joining in it, however unmusically, and all the others followed my example."

"And when it was over you were rewarded by a sight of beauty at the window!" with a decided sneer.

"Nothing of the kind. We looked up with longing eyes—and saw the wet window-panes—that was all."

"And quite as much as you deserved," said Alverley, quickly. "Who asked you to come and how?"

"Miss St. Heliers must have been extremely flattered." And the heiress looked rather cross.

"Do you think so?" said Harold, gravely. "I was afraid that he had annoyed her, because she shut up so quickly."

"As if a girl like that were ever annoyed at attention from the other sex!"

"If you were a man, Miss St. Heliers would have made you find it out by this time," said Captain Marston, with a mischievous smile.

"Why? Have you tried?"

"Often, and been most mercilessly rebuffed. Ask Alverley, ask Jerningham, they will all tell the same tale."

Miss Deyncourt, on the contrary, preferred to change the subject.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE Chase seemed a different place to Ruby after Lord Alverley had gone. She could walk in the shrubbery with no fear of finding an unwished-for companion. She could come down to the drawing-room in the evening free from the continual dread of Lord Alverley's secret attentions, bringing some unpleasant remark upon herself; but she missed his ready sympathy and keen interest, and life seemed tame, robbed of the perpetual excitement of his presence.

She would not allow it for a moment, and, indeed, told herself constantly what a comfort it was to think that he had gone; but the house seemed dull, and the park dreary, and something made her a little less careful of her appearance, for who would care to notice whether a red camellia or a white, were the more becoming?

Captain Marston stayed on, but the Countess had informed her that he was going to leave on the next Wednesday fortnight; and it was consequently settled that Violet should come and spend the long-promised day on the following Thursday. How Ruby looked forward to this day can well be imagined! A vista of rare delight opened before her eyes, when she thought that when two short weeks were over Violet would be sitting opposite to her in that ruby-leather chair, and she would have nothing to do but listen to her musical voice, and feast on the beauty of her childlike face.

Mrs. Upton had been called away to the sick bed of her mother, but she had not forgotten her former invitation to Miss St. Heliers' sister, and she hoped it would come off towards the end of the month, when that horrid Captain Marston would be safely out of the way.

Unconscious of the ominous shadow which was ever drawing nearer, Ruby went on her way bravely, enjoying every crumb of pleasure which chance threw in her way, and never repining over those which she lost. The frost came back, the lake was once more like a sheet of shining glass, and the party from the Chase amused themselves much on its smooth surface.

Ruby looked regretfully at the small pair of acme skates lying so uselessly in their leathern bag, but it seemed to be taken for granted by everyone that skating was not one of her many accomplishments; so she resigned herself to her fate, and told herself that it would be but little fun without the friends who used to make it so enjoyable.

One Tuesday afternoon a manly step came down the corridor, and stopped at the door

of the schoolroom. Ruby looked up in surprise as it opened slowly, and displayed the tall form of Harold Jerningham standing on the threshold.

"May I come in?" he asked, with a smile.

"I have been sent as an ambassador from my mother. It was only last night that I discovered through that child over there," with a nod at little May, who was bending over a French exercise, "that you were in the habit of skating at the Mount. May I ask if the ice at the Chase is not good enough for you?"

The colour crept into Ruby's cheeks.

"I don't know what it is like, as I never tried."

"Then the friends you were likely to meet were distasteful?"

"How could I come without being asked?"

"How could you walk in the garden unless somebody said, 'Do put on your boots?'"

"That is quite a different thing."

"I don't see it. The lake is open to the whole county, so I don't see why you should need a special invitation; but if you do, here it is. We are going to skate by torchlight as soon as it is dark, and if you will join us we shall only be too proud. My mother says you may send the children to her; so Miss Bee, mind you are on your best behaviour."

He patting both their curly heads and waited for his answer.

"I should like it very much," said Ruby, hesitatingly, as she thought of Lady Clementina, and her probable aversion to her society.

"That's all right; we shall look out for you about five o'clock. There will be most likely rather a queer lot down there, but I can promise that you shall be taken care of."

"Oh! there's a dear, good Harold, let me go too," implored Beatrice, as she caught hold of his short, shooting coat. "I should like to see the queer people."

"But the queer people mightn't see you, so they would run you down, and out you up into mischief. Don't forget, Miss St. Heliers, and with a cheerful nod he left the room."

A few hours later Ruby stood on the margin of the lake, confused by the flickering light of the torches, as the skaters waved them to and fro.

Every woman had a male in attendance, whether brother, friend, or lover, but Ruby stood patiently with her skates in her hand, unnoticed by Captain Marston, who was attending upon Lady Clementina, as well as by the rest of the gentlemen who formed part of the party at the house.

The two Miss Simpsons, conceited-looking girls with fluffy hair and puffy cheeks, started in a staggering manner, with a swain on either side, and were greeted with a roar of laughter; whilst Ruby, determined to be independent, sat down upon the bank and adjusted her own skates without difficulty.

"I meant to have done that for you, but a horrid girl, who wanted to trot me about as a walking stick, made me too late. Let us begin," and Harold Jerningham, his handsome face flushed with eagerness, held out his hands.

"Thank you; I had rather skate alone," was the unexpected answer.

"But that is impossible in such a crowd as this; besides, I feel as if I were responsible for you to my mother."

"I thought there must be some reason," as she rose reluctantly.

"You needn't have gone very far to find one. How beautifully you do it," gazing down on her lithe figure with involuntary admiration.

"Yes, if I can do nothing else, I can skate. You see I may be trusted alone."

"On the contrary, I see that, however much you dislike my company, I must stick to you to the last."

"Then the last shall come very quickly—that is all."

"You are very flattering. Did I say anything to offend you the other night? If so, I really wish you would tell me."

"I was not offended—only grieved," in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

"Let us get out of this crowd."

They put on a spurt and skated at a rapid pace through the ever-increasing throng till they gained a quiet corner at the end of the lake, where the stars shone out in the frosty sky, and the smoke of the torches looked like a luminous fog in the distance.

They drew up under the shadow of an evergreen oak, and still holding her small hands in his,—

"What have I done?" he asked, breathlessly.

"You have cruelly misjudged me," and she looked up into his face with fearless eyes.

His expression grew hard and resolute.

"I have only judged you according to what I have seen and heard, being neither blind nor deaf?"

"And what is that?"

"Better known to yourself than others—there is no use in repeating it."

"Then it has come to this; if I accept the friendship which your brother offers me—and remember what friendship is to a girl who has no friends—I am to be considered no longer worthy of your esteem?"

"I did not say that," looking down in some embarrassment at the ice.

"Your actions said it for you."

"I was naturally surprised to find that there was a secret understanding between you and my brother"—again the treacherous flush suffused her cheeks—he saw it, and it instantly prejudiced him against her—"and I thought it my duty to warn you."

"Then your warning was most unnecessary," drawing up her neck in proud disdain. "I have not lived nineteen years in the world without gaining some knowledge of men and their ways."

"You are nothing but a child, and may well fall into mischief without intending it, therefore I make all excuses."

"You are very kind!" with fine sarcasm.

"Believe me, I have nothing but kindness in my heart towards you."

"Hatred under the same name would not be very different!" and chafing under his calm rebuke she made a hole in the ice with the point of her skate, and thought of Lord Alverley for the first time, with an indescribable longing. He would never speak harshly to her, whatever she might take it into her head to do.

"You are mistaken," very shortly. "Perhaps you will confess that I was right to warn you, after all, when a man like Marston who has eyes like a ferret, made a joke of the matter in the smoking-room."

"A joke of what?" she looked up with wide-open eyes of terror. "Oh! tell me it wasn't of me and him!" and she laid her hand imploringly on his arm.

"Don't take it so much to heart," he said, in a hurry, as she turned so ashen white, that he thought she was going to faint. "Men must have something to chaff about, you know, and no one will give a second thought to it."

She was silent, standing there like a stricken deer, her eyes staring blankly before her. It seemed incredible to her that anyone could have noticed a word or look; for Alverley, to do him justice, had been exceedingly careful before people, and no one knew of the scene in the breakfast-room.

What could she say or do? Nothing. The accusation was true in so far as the secrecy was concerned; and how was anyone, beyond their two selves, to guess that friendship, not love, was at the bottom of it? She saw herself for a bitter moment the laughing-stock of the world, and then she rallied her courage and looked up.

"Perhaps we had better move on," she said, quietly, "or they may say that there is a secret understanding between you and me."

"Let them say what they like," he said, hotly, "only, for Heaven's sake, don't turn your back on the only true friend you have in the house."

He had struggled in vain against the fascination she had exercised over him from the

first; and now, moved by her agitation, he succumbed at once.

"What! you will be my friend in spite of everything?" she asked, in surprise.

"Yes; if you will have me. Whatever my eyes see, or my ears hear for the future, I will try to believe that you are right."

"Thank you, you are very good; but I feel as if I could never hold up my head again," and she gave a small sigh.

"You mean about Marston?" he said, eagerly; and then added with a sudden change of front, "I would not trouble myself about that because I shut him up promptly, and I don't think the others understood the allusion."

"Then you frightened me for nothing?"

"Not for nothing," with a smile. "Only to make you more careful for the future!"

"Then please recollect that what may be only a joke to others may be little short of death to me—alone and unprotected as I am."

"Not alone, I think," as they flew over the ice once more, "with offers of friendship on every side."

"But what are they worth, if they are to be misconstrued?"

"Mine won't be! Appeal to me when you are in a scrape, and I promise to help you out."

As he spoke his fingers were touching the serpent ring which was to remind her of her promise in a similar case to Alverley.

The two brothers seemed to run a chance of being the two stools between which she would fall to the ground; but casting aside all doubts and fears, she threw herself into the spirit of the animated scene around her, and determined to enjoy herself once more in her clouded life.

Captain Marston passed, holding a torch high in the air with his right hand, whilst he pioneered Lady Clementina with his left.

The light fell on his sombre beauty, as he bent his face towards his companion in eager conversation. Listening with downcast eyes, Lady Clementina looked so much softer than usual that Ruby wondered what the words could be which brought such an expression to her usually impassive face; and thinking of Violet's escape from his clutches, rejoiced to know that he would go away on the morrow without a suspicion that she was coming to Chester Chase the day after.

"Why don't you carry a torch?" as she noticed for the first time that they were almost the only couple without one.

Harold laughed. "Because I like to see, without being seen. Darkness gives an independence to our actions which a flaring light would deprive us of."

"That sounds as if we were doing something we were ashamed of."

"Not at all, but I like to skate with whomsoever I choose, without setting every tongue in the place wagging."

"I think it is time for you to choose another companion," and she stopped amongst a group of loiterers.

"As long as it remains a matter of choice," he said, very low, "that time will never come."

"Never?" with questioning eyes upraised for a moment to his.

The light of many torches fell upon her lovely face, and Harold felt his pulses quicken, as he saw a wistful smile hovering round her lips. Involuntarily his grasp on her small hands tightened as he drew a deep breath, looking down upon her with a strange expression in his eyes. In another moment he would have spoken words that would never have been forgotten, but as they were about to pour from his heart a hand was laid upon his arm, and a familiar voice exclaimed,—

"Run you to earth at last! Miss St. Heliers, let me carry you off, if only for five minutes." And the next minute Archibald Graves had whisked her away to the other end of the lake, whilst Harold was left to recover himself as best he could. He told himself that he was a fool—a consummate ass—and other complimentary substantives as he lighted a

cigar, and stood still to watch for the return of the only couple that seemed to interest him.

As Ruby and Mr. Graves passed Captain Marston, he turned to Lady Clementina, and asked, "What is it that makes Miss St. Heliers look so transported with happiness?"

"How am I to know? perhaps she is in love with Mr. Graves, or perhaps she is proud of her skating."

"The fox-hunter is not the sort of man she would fancy; there must be something more than that."

"Indeed! you seem to know all about her likes and dislikes. Perhaps you have heard that she has a sister whom she considers a little lower than the angels, and that we are to have the privilege of having her down here the day after to-morrow," and she stopped to button her glove, little guessing at the evil she had wrought by her careless speech.

He started, his heart gave a bound, his eyes gleamed.

"Down here?" he repeated, hoarsely.

"Yes; mamma asked her out of charity, as Miss St. Heliers has been deprived of her expected holidays. Unfortunately, we shall not have the pleasure of seeing her, as I am going to spend the day with the Morningtons, and mamma takes the children over to luncheon at Ripley, so Miss St. Heliers will have her all to herself."

"And I go to-morrow," he said, as if to himself.

"Yes. What a break-up it will be," she answered, with a sigh; "especially as you take Harold with you."

"Not with me. If the frost breaks up he is going to Melton Mowbray first."

"Well, it will be all the same to us, but perhaps it is as well. I can't help fancying that Miss St. Heliers is a flirt."

"Show me a woman who isn't!"

"Hush! What was that?"

A cry of terror—a sudden rush—a loud-rolling crack, which made the ice tremble under their feet, and then a hubbub of excited voices.

"Come on to the bank, the ice isn't safe."

Captain Marston dragged her into safety on terra firma, and darted off, calling out,—

"A woman's hurt."

(To be continued.)

SAPPED AND BLIGHTED LIVES.—Too many families suffer and too many lives are sapped and blighted by the excessive individualism of those who should hold it part of their "business" to make home happy and to fill the minds of others with energy in life by a sympathetic share of their own inspiration. When the head of a family lives in a little world of his own, he is practically cut off from the sources of natural and domestic happiness, and before long he may expect to become, if he is not already, a caterpillar who has spun around him a cocoon, of very good material it may be, but by no means personally or intellectually attractive to those around him. And, what is worse, he has deprived, or is depriving, the members of his own home and family of the warmth and vitality which they have a right to expect from him. He is the sun of the little social system, and if the sun refuses to shine beyond the boundary of a little world of its own, banked in by heavy, dull, and repellent clouds, light and life fade. It is not merely selfish, but wicked to live too reclusively and exclusively in our little worlds. It is a crime against self in its true sense to live a life of loneliness and isolation. The mind becomes disorganized and preys on itself when it is, as it were, hide-bound by the neglect of social obligations. To the young loneliness is destructive, mentally and physically. What we need, all of us, to learn is that it is possible, and in practice likely, that the mind which has a tendency to isolation will separate itself from its natural surroundings and live for and to itself in a little world of its own.

"ONLY."

ONLY a trifle, yet broken
Are seals that were heavy and strong;
Only a word, lightly spoken,
Yet the soul bursteth forth into song.

Only a dew-drop, yet brighter
The verdure of meadow and lawn;
Only a sunbeam, yet lighter
And fairer the rosy-hued dawn.

Only a day, a mere glimmer
Of time, as it vanisheth fast;
Only a day, growing dimmer
'Mid shadows and gloom of the past.

Only a day, yet for ever
Its impulse shall with thee remain;
And the fruit of its labours shall never
Be given to ripen again.

Only a day—just the ripple
Of a leaf on life's stream flowing fast,
Yet bearing an argosy triple
The future, the present, the past.

Time was, when it glittered before thee,
A part of futurity's dream,
And brighter the Heavens were o'er thee
With hope-star's Utopian beam.

Time is, when it hovers around thee,
And lingers an hour by thy side,
While spells of fair promise that bound thee
Go drifting away with the tide.

Time will be, when dawneth the morrow,
When vanished for aye it will be,
A token of pleasure or sorrow
Its only remembrance for thee.

Only a day, nor yet ever
Its moments forgotten shall be,
Till bubbles of time-stream for ever
Are whelmed in eternity's sea.

J. W. F.

WILFUL, BUT LOVING.

CHAPTER I.

SOMEWHERE in the midland shires of England, full a hundred miles from the toil and turmoil of our great London, on the outskirts of a little market-town, stands or stood, some years ago, a large, red-brick house, carefully shut in within high walls, which cut off its inhabitants from the scrutiny of the passer-by, and prevented anyone who stood at the windows from seeing anything of the world beyond.

Perhaps you think the house was a prison, or at least a nunnery. It was neither. The red-brick edifice was simply Miss Mace's establishment for young ladies. Beneath those walls damsels of any age, from seven to seventeen, or even older, pursued the thorny road to learning, and were carefully screened from the mild directions of the little town of Pennington and its inhabitants.

Prosperity had smiled upon Miss Mace. For twenty miles round her school was known and valued as the best in the neighbourhood. The small white beds in the long, dreary dormitories were rarely empty. Each vacancy was filled up with delightful alacrity, and the worthy principal was reported to be "coining money." This may have been; certainly she had a snug balance at the nearest bank, and could look forward without alarm to the days of old age.

Not that Miss Mace often troubled herself about old age. At fifty-two, with a vigorous constitution, an unimpaired digestion, and a remarkable talent for managing wayward girls, the worthy principal of Pallas House may be pardoned for believing she had barely passed her prime.

It was the month of December, within a week of the Christmas holidays. Miss Mace sat alone in her spacious drawing-room, com-

forbly ensconced in an old-fashioned arm-chair. She wore her best black silk dress, and lace mittens on her skinny hands.

It was market-day at Pennington, and on such occasions Miss Mace was wont to don festive attire, and sent herself in state ready to receive the parents of pupils past, present and future. This afternoon her labour had been all in vain—not a creature had called. Maria Mace hated needless extravagance; she looked at the fire, and sighed, "What waste of good coal!" She stroked her silk dress sympathetically, as though to condole with it on wasting its sweetness on the desert air, and then she drew the one candle a little nearer, and went on industriously with her knitting.

"Six o'clock!" as the chimes of the distant church fell on her ear, "no one will be here to-night. Dear I dear! and half a scuttle of coals gone! What a pity!"

But for once she had reckoned without her host; the front-door bell sounded a tremendous peal, re-echoing through the house.

"Only the postman," decided poor Miss Mace, trying not to let herself hope; "only the post. What an impatient creature that boy is."

A rap at the drawing-room door, and a servant entered; a housemaid, looking nearly as prim as her mistress. It was perfectly wonderful, the primness imparted to anyone by a long residence at Pallas House!

Miss Mace stretched out her hand mechanically for a letter. By the dim light of the one candle something on the waiter really looked like a letter, and received instead a card inscribed with the name of the Earl of St. Clare.

Maria Mace started; she bore most shocks with equanimity—had not even jumped when the widow of a city knight called to ask for a prospectus. But an earl—a real live scion of nobility to enter her drawing-room—it was really too much!

"I said you were at home, ma'am," remarked the servant, "and the gentleman said he wished to see you alone; his business was important."

"Draw down the blinds," gasped Miss Mace. "Light the gas—all three burners, Susan—and put some more coals on the fire. Do be quick, girl; don't keep his lordship waiting like this!"

Visions of titled pupils—of Pallas House being peopled by children of the nobility—danced before her eyes. Small bead-like eyes at the best of times they were, and just now they perfectly glittered with excitement.

Another moment and Susan had ushered in a tall, stately man in deep mourning—a man who had the stamp of aristocracy on every feature, and yet who caused Miss Mace a convulsion of despair. He was so young, twenty-seven at the most; he could have no daughters old enough to benefit by the advantages of her establishment. Then she brightened—he might have sisters!

"Miss Mace," began the stranger, interrogatively, "I think, the principal of this establishment?"

"Yes," returned Miss Mace, eagerly, "I am. May I inquire to what I owe the honour of your lordship's visit?"

Considering it was her first attempt at conversing with nobility she flattered herself she got on remarkably well.

Lord St. Clare hesitated. He rose, went to the door to see that it was securely fastened, returned, and drew his chair a trifle nearer to Miss Mace's.

"My business is of a private and delicate nature. May I ask if we are safe from interruption?"

"Perfectly safe, my lord!" replied the spinster, all in a flutter of agitation; "my pupils are engaged at their studies; no visitors are likely to call at such an hour. I am entirely at your service."

He bowed, but was so long in speaking that her curiosity was fairly feverish.

"You have been here a long time," the Earl began at last. "Seventeen or eighteen years I think, Miss Mace?"

"Twenty-two," corrected Maria, feeling just

a little diffident at contradicting a nobleman, and yet wishing him to be aware of her full length of tenure of Pallas House. "Twenty-two this very month."

"Ah! and you have lived here yourself all this time; you have never deputed another to take your place?"

"Never!" bridling a little. "I may have absented myself for a week or two occasionally during the holidays for needful change; but then the house has been shut up. I have never for a day or hour delegated my authority as mistress of this establishment."

"Then I can speak to you with all confidence?"

"Certainly."

"Fifteen years ago, this very month, you had a death in the house—a young lady, who acted as your English teacher."

It was a sore subject even now. She had not been ungenerous to the poor, friendless governess, but she had never quite forgiven her for presuming to impugn the healthiness of Pallas House by dying there.

"Miss Lynn would have died anywhere," retorted Miss Mace, "she was in a decline, poor thing."

"It was not her death I desired to speak of, but other circumstances. She left, I think, a child?"

"She did."

"Which you kept under your care?"

"Not for nothing," explained Miss Mace, who had one strong point—an unvarying truthfulness. "An old man came to see Miss Lynn on her death-bed, and asked me the lowest possible sum for which I could educate the child. He looked wretchedly poor; his clothes were nearly threadbare, and he carried an umbrella in rags, so I could not ask him much. I said fifteen pounds a year; and, to do him justice, little as it was it has been regularly paid."

"And you never discovered the old man's name, madam, in all these years?"

"Never," she confessed. "At first I own I was rather curious upon the subject, but the money came so regularly, the whole affair grew so much a matter of course, that for years I have ceased to speculate upon it."

"The old man was my uncle, Miss Mace, my uncle and adopted father, the late Earl of St. Clare."

"What!" cried the school mistress. "He? Why the parish clerk is better dressed."

"That mean attire was assumed as a disguise. I will explain everything; indeed, I owe it to you to do so, even if I did not need your aid in a matter very near myself."

Miss Mace vowed she was prepared for anything after that shabby old man being a peer.

"The young widow who taught in your school was the late Earl's only child, the Lady Evelyn Dene. At eighteen she eloped from her house with a man her father considered beneath her."

"And he treated her cruelly, I'll be bound," suggested Miss Mace. "Mrs. Lynn looked like a woman whose heart was broken."

"I cannot tell you that. I only know that for years my uncle laboured under the mistake that his daughter had been no wife—that her child was illegitimate. It was for that cause he concealed his identity from you; he could not bear that anyone should know disgrace was the portion of his only child."

He paused and half sighed; evidently the latter part of his story was the most difficult to him.

"Only six months ago my uncle learnt the truth. The person through whom he had been deceived confessed her treachery upon her death-bed, and restored the certificates of Lady Evelyn's marriage, and by her daughter's wish the Earl would have come himself to you only illness stepped in. From that illness he never recovered. His dying charge to me was to come here and tell you this story, and to beg your acceptance of two thousand pounds as a slight mark of his regret for the miserable pittance he had sent you all these years."

"I am sure I can never thank your uncle enough, or you either, my lord, for your kindness in coming here to bring me the news."

"I have not finished, Miss Mace," said St. Clare, with an awkward laugh. "You will find in the end it is I who shall be your debtor."

"There is nothing I would not be glad to do to assist your lordship's plan. Perhaps you would like to see your cousin?"

"Presently. What is she like?"

"She is nearly eighteen," returned Miss Mace. "Really I do not know how to describe her; she is a timid, shrinking girl, though she has lived here all her life. I know much less of her real character than I know of many pupils who have been with me but one year."

"Ah! and she is a lady."

"Assuredly."

"Pretty?"

Miss Mace shook her head.

"Her mother was beautiful; Dora is not in the least like her. She is a strange, unsocial girl."

The young man sighed—at least it was more like a groan than a sigh.

"What a description! and she is to be my wife! Think of it, madam, and if you have a woman's heart in your breast pity me—this girl of whom, even you, after years of close intercourse, can tell me little favourable—this strange unsocial creature must be my wife, Countess of St. Clare, head of a family, whose women have been noted for their beauty, their grace, and charm. Oh, it is unendurable!"

"But is there no alternative," asked Miss Mace, touched as what woman could not have been at this appeal from a young, handsome nobleman.

"Surely, Lord St. Clare, no human power can make you marry my unfortunate pupil since the match is so evidently against your wishes."

"It is the old story," he said, gloomily. "I cannot dig to beg I am ashamed. Forgive me for quoting scripture, madam. I have some excuse for anger. I was brought up by my uncle's heir; his name was the last in the entail, even had I not deemed myself his nearest in kin. I was so thoroughly the son of his affection that I never doubted all would be mine; and then this story came, and he heard that his daughter's child was in every dead and truth, a lawful scion of the St. Clares."

"You cannot mean that he has made Dora his heiress? Surely he might have divided the property between you?"

"I never wished to rob the girl," said St. Clare, gloomily. "With two estates, a town house, and an income of a hundred thousand pounds, he might surely have made provision for us both."

"And has he not?"

"He has left St. Clare and Riverdene, the mansion in Belgrave and every farthing he possesses to me on condition that I marry his granddaughter."

"And if you refuse?"

"It is hers, absolutely."

Neither of them entered into the other chance that his cousin might refuse the honours offered her; that a little obscure school-girl should refuse to become a countess never crossed their minds; in fact, though St. Clare was as free from vanity as most men, it had never entered his head to ask what would become of the property in such a case. From boyhood upwards women had smiled upon him; no fair face had ever failed to brighten at his compliments; it was hardly likely, then, that he could fail to know his own attractions.

"It is a strange history," said Miss Mace, slowly. "I never heard of such a will; it sounds monstrous. Would it not be possible to upset it?"

He shook his head.

"My uncle was not a very old man, only seventy-four at the time of his death. His intellect was strong and clear; besides, even if the will was disposed of, the results would be the same. Miss Clifford's claim would be nearer than mine."

Miss Mace looked into the fire. She was a

very clever woman, and, to quote an expression of her own, could see as far into a post as most people; but she failed to see any escape for the Earl of St. Clare from the alternatives of poverty, or an uncongenial marriage.

"Would you like to see her?"

"I suppose I must. I fear I shall exhaust your patience, but I have yet a favour to ask. Will you provide Miss Clifford with everything suited to an heiress, and see that she reaches St. Clare by Christmas Eve? My uncle's will directs that so soon as he shall have been dead three months his granddaughter is to be received at his castle, and reside there until our marriage."

"The earl never doubted your consent, then?"

"Never once. He knew I had been unused to poverty, and he seems to have been possessed with an idea his granddaughter would be a beauty. Her mother, I have heard, was the loveliest woman in the county. Even I, child as I was at the time of her disappearance, have a faint remembrance of her attractions."

"I fear you will have no resemblance to her in her daughter."

"Then you will kindly arrange the details; my lawyer will wait on you to-morrow to hand you my uncle's legacy; he will also furnish you with whatever sums you deem necessary for the young lady's expenses. And now (and a strangely bitter smile crossed the young man's face) I will ask you to introduce me to my future wife!"

Miss Mace rose at once and left the room. Turned fifty though she was, she felt in quite a glow of excitement at the romance going on under her roof. It read like a chapter out of a novel. Oh! why had not Miss Clifford been beautiful, or even pretty? Why was she such a plain, shrinking creature, whom it was well-nigh impossible a young earl would love?

In the study, inspecting the progress of the juniors' lessons, that was where Miss Mace expected to find her half-pupil, but she was not there; and Mademoiselle denied all knowledge of her. In the bedroom, officiating at the *coucher* of the tiniest pupils? No, a stout housemaid was fulfilling that task.

Miss Mace was getting into despair; she had been away fully ten minutes. Lord St. Clare would surely think his cousin needed a great deal of preparation to fit her for his presence.

When it came into the principal's head to look into the music-room, a tiny slip on the ground-floor, little used that severe weather, because having no fireplace, it had been found impossible to warm it sufficiently for human habitation.

The piano being the oldest of the four on the premises, and with many of its notes dumb, mattered little.

The moonlight poured in at the unshuttered window, and disclosed a slight form crouching by the piano; one hand picked out a few melodious chords, and a voice, full and sweet, though a little tremulous, sang an old ballad. In spite of herself, Miss Mace was impressed by the picture.

"That child is music mad," she thought. "I believe she would rather be an opera singer than a countess." Aloud, she called in her sharpest tone, "Dora, what are you doing here?"

Dora started; for the principal herself to appear in scholastic regions at that hour was something remarkable. She felt frightened almost without knowing why, and with the instinct of a creature often blamed, she began to defend herself.

"Mademoiselle gave me leave to come, madam, and Ann is upstairs with the little ones putting them to bed."

"Mademoiselle was very wrong indeed," said Miss Mace. "Sitting here in the cold! Why your hands must be blue and your feet frozen. Come away at once!"

This consideration for her own comfort was something so new that Dora started far more than she would have done at the scolding she had anticipated. She followed Miss Mace timidly to a small room known as the class-

room, where the principal gave her own lessons, and was wont to retire on such occasions as the drawing-room was not used. Miss Mace shut the door, and dragged Dora to the bright fire.

"Warm your hands a little and then come with me; I want you in the drawing-room, to see a visitor."

The drawing-room! Dora opened her eyes. Never since she could remember had her presence been requested there to see a visitor. True she had occasionally assisted in dusting the apartment for some great festival, but never in her life had she been bidden there as a guest.

Miss Mace watched her with suppressed irritation. Why, oh! why, was Dora so hopelessly bad-looking! What a poor impression she would convey to the young earl of the advantages enjoyed at the school; and the principal had never admired her half-pupil, but her decided plainness had never returned to her so strongly as now.

Some girls look their best at seventeen. Their earliest bloom of womanhood is full of promise, but Dora was not of their type. She looked too big to be a child; too angular, too unformed to be a woman. She was already of middle height, and had probably not stopped growing. Her arms were too long for her plain, tight sleeves, and her country-made boots escaped from her untrimmed skirt.

Her complexion was that peculiar hue ladies call muddy. Just now, too, the excessive cold had given it a leaden, ashen tinge, and Miss Mace's admonitions to warm herself could not dispel it. Her hands were long and thin, and almost purple with the cold. Her hair was rough and frizzy, and arranged with so little skill as to make its abundance seem more a deformity than an ornament. She wore a grey stuff dress, warm and comfortable, but deplorably plain and unbecoming. It had been made a year ago, and was now considerably outgrown. There was no attempt at ornament—not even a bow of coloured ribbon at the opening of the narrow white collar.

Miss Mace groaned. She would have liked to take the girl into her own bedroom and dress her afresh from her own hoards, just to save the earl's feelings a little; but, alas! he had already been kept waiting fully twenty minutes, it was impossible to detain him longer. And so with a resolute effort to make the best of it, Miss Mace took Dora's hand and led her upstairs.

"Your cousin is waiting for you. I trust, Dora, you will be grateful to him for his kindness in coming all this distance to see you, and invite you to spend the approaching vacation at his house."

But there was a defiant gleam in the girl's eyes. Dora had beautiful eyes, some people said they were her only good feature.

"I don't want to go to his house, Miss Mace. I don't want to see him!"

"I am ashamed of you, after his kindness."

"He has let me alone for nearly eighteen years!" returned the girl. "I think his kindness comes too late to command my gratitude!"

Miss Mace was silent from sheer surprise.

There were times when she would not quite understand Dora Clifford, when the girl seemed beyond her comprehension. This was one. In perfect silence she led the way to the drawing-room door, and held it open for her half-pupil to enter. She herself did not follow her; some subtle instinct told her that however embarrassing her *little-while* might be to the stranger cousins, it was yet best no other eyes should witness their meeting.

CHAPTER II.

CASTLE ST. CLARE was a noble pile, situated in one of the most picturesque parts of Kent; the beautiful grounds extended for miles; the timber was the finest in the county—for centuries the woodman's axe had not been heard on the St. Clare estates; the Denes were not a rockless race. Generous and openhanded

as the day, they had never been given to prodigal extravagance, and had often chosen the richest heiresses in England for their wives; and so it came about that, generation after generation had increased in wealth and importance, until Laurence, nineteenth Earl of St. Clare, upon his deathbed would not sacrifice the greatness of his family by dividing his possessions, but made a will he thought would secure alike the happiness of his grandchildren and the prosperity of his race.

Castle St. Clare itself was a stately building of white stone, worn grey by the hand of centuries; it was approached by an avenue of chestnuts; then came spacious pleasure-grounds—on one side the grand porticoed entrance, on the other a raised terrace ran the whole length of the house, from which you reached its walks through a long, narrow conservatory, or winter garden, into which all the apartments that side of the castle opened. There were five—the large and small drawing-rooms, the ball and music-rooms, and a snug octagon chamber, known as my lady's boudoir.

For more than thirty years this boudoir had had no lawful owner, since for that space there had been no Countess of St. Clare. The lady Evelyn Dene had, indeed, made it her favourite resort, but after her flight it fell into disuse, and had only been re-opened and feebly decorated five years before, when the Earl's niece, tired of a London season, came on a long visit to the castle.

The day after her brother's interview, with Miss Mace, she sat there idly toying with some fancy embroidery, a very pretty woman and a very proud one, the wife of an officer in the Guards, and the mother of two charming children.

Beatrice Fane paid but little attention to her work, her thoughts were busy with other things; she was devotedly attached to her brother, and their uncle's will had troubled her sadly.

"What is to become of Alan, Lionel," she asked her husband the moment they were alone. "After that fatal discovery, he cannot keep up the title on his own means; an Earl with four hundred a-year, it is absurd."

The Captain played with his moustache. "Miss Clifford may not be so very objectionable," he suggested, with an attempt at hopefulness.

"Lionel, I know she will be odious; beside, there is Blanche, you must know that she and Alan understand each other."

"If they understand each other, Bee, nothing matters, dear," and he bent over his wife with a caress that was very love-like, coming from a husband of over four years' standing.

"Blanche has her little portion; they will make up eight hundred a-year or so between them; and you know, child, we contrive to be very happy on not much more."

"But we are not an earl and countess?"

"Don't worry, little woman, things will come right if Blanche is true to Alan; he might get a diplomatic appointment or something to add to his income. Besides, Bee, you forget no one has heard anything of Miss Clifford for fifteen years; she may be dead, poor girl, or married already."

And Bee, albeit by nature the kindest-hearted of women took up the idea enthusiastically. The orphan girl was dead, nothing had been heard of her for years; they would put up a beautiful marble cross over her grave, and then Blanche and Alan would be happy.

Blanche was her own intimate friend and her husband's now, from the first moment of the young lady coming to reside with her.

Beatrice had thrown her in her brother's way; she had given the two every possible opportunity for falling in love, and into love they had fallen most hopelessly; in fact, their wedding-day had been well nigh fixed, when Lord St. Clare was seized by the illness which proved fatal, and his extraordinary will had upset every one's calculations.

Nothing had passed between the young people since. Indeed, they had had no opportunity

for explanations. Blanche had been away on a visit at the time of the Earl's death.

"Of course this will make no difference, my darling," wrote Alan. "I will win a fortune for you yet!" and Blanche had written back demurely, begging him to do nothing rash, for her sake—that might mean anything or nothing.

Alan Lord St. Clare had told Miss Mace he would probably marry his cousin. He did not think it necessary to explain—he only meant in the case of his rejection by another lady. Alas! poor fellow, madly as he loved Blanche Delaval, he had little, very little, hope that she would be faithful to him in adversity. A favoured child of fortune—a creature made to be worshipped and admired—what right had he, with his beggarly four hundred a-year to bind her to a promise given when he expected his income to be about two hundred times that sum.

She came in presently and interrupted Beatrice in her reverie. Blanche had been home—she called wherever her youthful guardians were home—just two days, therefore she and the Earl had not yet met. As she entered, dressed with all that taste and elegance could do to enhance her beauty, Bee gave a little sigh.

"What's the matter?"

"Alan will be here to-night."

"That's nothing to sigh about, ma'am."

"Blanche, do be serious."

"I am, I assure you, entirely serious. Why should a devoted sister like you sigh because her brother is expected?"

"It is all so different now. Poor fellow! he must feel this meeting with you so much."

"I think I ought to be the person to feel it most," said Blanche, lightly; "fate has provided Lord St. Clare with an heiress to console him for my loss; fate has done nothing at all for me except rob me of my fiancé."

"Blanche, you know Alan will be true to you. Oh, why did not my uncle know of your engagement? Why did you keep it secret?"

"He preferred to,"—forgetting to mention that she had insisted upon the secrecy as the sole condition of her acceptance.

"Well, I suppose you will settle things to-night, dear; do be true to yourself."

"Seriously, Bee; do you think it would be right to let Lord St. Clare refuse so much money, and to rob the heiress of her chance of a peerage?"

"I think if you love each other, nothing in the whole world should part you."

"Not even such vulgar considerations as eating and drinking, clothing and shelter! None of which, oh! most romantic friend, can be provided for by love."

She sank down upon the sofa and played with her watch chain. This lover of Alan Dene's was a tall majestic creature, with a figure perfect in its lovely development, although she was barely twenty-two. She was clad in floating robes of pale blue silk open at the throat to show glimpses of her fair, shapely neck; the sleeves were short, and only delicate lace shaded the plump, rounded arms. Her face was oval and had a faint pink colour; her hair, a tawny shade of gold, was curled and frizzed upon her forehead, and the rest gathered in an auction knot at the back of her head. Her lips were ruby, her eyes, the brightest shade of hazel, fringed with black lashes.

Everyone admired Blanch Delaval; she had broken more than one honest heart, and her enemies called her an arrant flirt; but Lord St. Clare and his sister had seen nothing of this. Bee's health had been so delicate since Blanche came to live with her, that she had never been the young lady's chaperone, and so knew very little of her manner in general society. She had watched Miss Delaval closely when with her brother, and she believed that the wayward beauty loved him truly; but Miss Fane, who herself made a love-match at twenty, really had very little experience in the arts of such sirens as the tawny-haired beauty opposite her.

"I wonder what she is like?"

"Who?" asked Bee, quietly.

"The heiress, Miss Clifford."

"Don't talk about her, we shall know everything soon; Alan must be here in half-an-hour, I should think."

In less than that time they heard the sound of the dog-cart returning, but, to his sister's surprise, Lord St. Clare went straight to his own room; when he approached the boudoir it was in the faultless evening attire of the nineteenth century; he shook hands warmly with Captain Fane, kissed his sister tenderly, and then advanced to Blanche. Miss Delaval gave him her hand, formerly she had accorded him something more, but the tall footman had just entered to announce dinner, so doubtless that was why a lover's privileges were denied him.

Dinner seemed an endless meal to at least two of the four who sat at the long, oaken table. Beatrice Fane could hardly control her anxiety, and Alan felt each moment an hour until he had seen Blanche Delaval alone and learned his fate from her own lips. Even Captain Fane found it hard work to keep the ball of conversation rolling, and his ward was the only person who seemed entirely at her ease. Bee hoped her brother would begin to speak as soon as the servant had retired, but he went on discussing politics with the captain, and so, weary of the long suspense, she gave Blanche the signal to retire, and the gentlemen were left to themselves.

"Well, Alan, how have you sped?" cried Lionel, heartily. "I hope well, for your own sake, and Bee's. She has been in a perfect fever of anxiety, poor child."

"And your ward?"

"Blanche is cast in another mould from my little wife. I never understand what she feels or thinks; but I have been telling Bee, even at the worst, things won't be so bad between you. You can make up eight hundred a-year; we have very little more, and I don't think Bee will tell you she has been very miserable since your uncle gave her to me."

Alan wrung his hand.

"Things could not be much worse, Lionel. Heaven help me, I never meant to count on that poor girl's death—never once—and yet it was a bitter pang to me to find her alive!"

Lionel glanced at a full-length portrait opposite them; it represented Lady Evelyn Dene in the first bloom of her womanhood—a lovely, girlish creature, with a shadowy resemblance to Alan's sister.

"But for your attachment to Blanche I don't think I should pity you. Evelyn Dene's daughter must be rarely beautiful."

"Beautiful!" cried Alan, with a bitter laugh; "wait till you see her."

A great fear came to Lionel.

"Do you mean that she is deformed?"

"She looks like a kitchen-maid or a charity girl—I don't know which."

"Alan! remember you are speaking of your kinswoman!" cried Captain Fane, in honest indignation. "You may not choose to marry her, but you have no right to insult her!"

"It is the simple truth, Fane; the girl is simply unbearable. Tall and angular, she looked all legs and arms; she is afraid to speak above a whisper, and called me sir at every other word. If I had never seen my Blanche it would be hard enough upon me to make such a creature my wife, the mother of my children; but now" (there was an indescribable sadness in his voice), "in place of my bright, beautiful darling, fate offers me this repulsive, underbred young woman. Oh! it is too much."

"What have you done?"

"I have told the schoolmistress the whole state of the case, and the girl will be here next Thursday. There is no occasion for her to know her grandfather's wishes, unless they are to be realized betwixt now and Thursday. I must ask my fate from Blanche."

"And if Blanche refuses!"

"I shall be so desperate, nothing will matter much. If Blanche forsakes me I may as well sacrifice myself; after all, I can leave the young woman at one of the county seats, and live

at the other myself. Thank goodness, we should be rich enough to go our separate ways."

"Alan! that is madness—worse; it is cruelty. If you marry Miss Clifford you must at least try to make her happy."

Alan shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't preach, Lionel; it is bad enough as it is."

He rose abruptly and left the room. In the boudoir he found Blanche Delaval alone; Bee had thoughtfully absented herself. The soft rays of the moderator lamp shone full upon his darling, and lit up every charm of her beautiful face. Alan flung himself on the ground at her feet.

"Blanche! which is it to be? Darling, can an old man's chimera part us; but for accidents ere this you would be my own. Be true to me, my darling, my heart's best love, and in spite of comparative poverty, we shall be happy."

She shivered just a little; perhaps she felt cold, but she only said in her soft rich voice:—"Get up, Alan, I cannot bear to see you there."

He rose and took a place beside her on the sofa, one arm encircled her waist, the other hand played with her tawny hair; gradually she yielded to the pressure of that clasp. Alan strained her to his heart and pressed hot passionate kisses upon her lips and brow.

"My darling," he murmured, "I knew you loved me; I knew whatever happened you would be true to me! Oh! Blanche, how could I doubt your constancy for a moment! Let me hear my happiness from your own lips, my sweet; speak to me, my dearest, and tell me you are still my own."

The room seemed to swim round with Blanche Delaval. She felt as though she had two selves. The one cried out for wealth, was the slave of ambition; the other answered that love was better, said rather be at Alan's side in poverty than share any splendour without him.

She did love Alan—loved him with a fierce, sensuous passion; but she loved wealth better. Blanche Delaval was a coquette heart and soul; she was the slave of ambition. Her whole love was Alan's; but, alas! women such as she live for other things than love.

"You know I love you, Alan!"

He kissed her again and again. Worldly-minded, ambitious as she was, it did cross her mind—would life be worth the living for without his love? Then came another, crueler thought—could she not retain his love always, even though she refused to share his poverty?

"I love you, Alan," she murmured, her head still nestling on his breast. "I love you too well to be your ruin."

"You could never be that," he cried, wildly. "I will not come between you and your splendid heritage. I will not rob you of the wealth you thought your birthright!"

"I should not value it without you."

"I cannot do it," she continued, with what sounded like a sob in her voice. "Because a few words bound you to me why should I rob you of all power and influence among your fellow-men? You are free—free to marry the heiress, and forget the poor girl, who had little but her love to bring you!"

She had loosed herself from his embrace, and almost before he knew her purpose, she had left him alone.

"My darling!" murmured Alan. "my sweet, unselfish darling; but I shall convince her the sacrifice is needless, and that we can be very happy on small means. Blanche and I will have love and a cottage, while my uncle's untrained niece rules as queen at St. Clare and Riverdene. I must go and find Bee; she will make my darling hear reason."

(To be continued.)

THE difference between rising at five and seven o'clock in the morning, for the space of forty years, supposing a man goes to bed at the same hour at night, is nearly equivalent to the addition of ten years to a man's life.

PUT TO THE PROOF.

CHAPTER X.

"WHAT is the matter with Dickie's daughter, dear?" asked Mark, as he pulled his lady-love off to the shore.

"I don't know, the poor girl is ill, and I must manage to take her something to amuse her, and some fruit to-night. Perhaps I shall send for our servant, Peggy Dale, to nurse her. Peggy is a splendid nurse."

Just as they landed Carl Gonther came sauntering along the shore, a big bunch of roses in his hand and a cigarette in his mouth.

He was looking very handsome, and Mark resented his good looks as though they were a sin against himself, who was decidedly not handsome, though he had a clever pleasant face.

As he sprang out Carl came forward to assist Vashti, but Mark curtly told him he would "look after Miss Paget;" and Carl, with cool audacity, ignored his unconvincing speech by holding out his hand to Vashti, who, seeing the stormy light in her lover's eyes, sensibly jumped out without the assistance of either.

"That recalls a scene I witnessed this morning," said Carl, coolly putting the roses in Vashti's hand; "two cats were after one pretty little grey mouse, and while they snarled at each other the mouse made off."

Mark was speaking to the man from whom he had hired the boat, so he did not hear this, or hear Vashti protest against taking the dewy bunch of roses.

"If you will not take them from me, Miss Paget, throw them into the sea; I'll have none of them."

And Vashti, loving flowers dearly, did not like them to be destroyed, so she kept them.

Mark coming towards them saw Vashti's drooped eyes and pink flushed cheeks that had been so pale before Carl came. He tried to smother the feeling of jealousy and suspicion, and thought angrily of himself,—

"I am a jealous fool, 'tis my weak point; and though I know it makes an idiot of me, I cannot cure myself of this failing. I wonder now if Vashti is a coquette; one would think so to see her now, yet she won me by her unaffected honesty and unconsciousness of self. I wonder why I hate that fellow so; he is well-mannered, good-looking, and is, I believe clever—yet I detest him."

When Mark reached them Vashti was saying hurriedly,—

"I would not go to the lighthouse now if I were you. Hero is ill, and Dickie has no time to spare to visitors."

"What's the matter with the girl? This illness is sudden."

"'Tis only a feverish cold, I think. I shall send a doctor to her if she is not better to-night."

"You seem fond of the girl."

"Yes, she was my playfellow when we were children together; she is a good little soul, so staunch and true in her affection, and the loveliest little fairy imaginable."

"You set me longing to see her," said Mark. "A really beautiful woman is such a rarity."

Vashti hid her face in the roses a second. She had not thought Mark cared for a woman's looks, and, for the first time, wished to be a beauty.

Carl lighted a fresh cigarette, and said, as he puffed out a cloud of smoke,—

"If I were you, Miss Paget, I should not go to the lighthouse till I knew what was really the matter with this lovely Hero of yours. There are several cases of fever in Balmfield; she may have caught it; she was always trotting into the town on some pretence or other, just to show her pretty face, I suppose. It is rather rough on the girl to be ill, with only Dickie to look after her."

"Yes, it is, indeed, poor child; but I am

not afraid to go, even if she has a fever; I never catch any disease, perhaps because I am not timid."

"If you are not timid, Vashti, I am for you. You must not risk your health, and will I am sure give up the idea of seeing her again till you know what is the matter with her. I will go into the town, and get some nice things, and ask Dr. King to see her."

Vashti looked worried, and said, hastily,—

"No, no, you must not do that. Dickie is proud; he would feel hurt. He can afford to call in a doctor if it is necessary himself."

"Very well," answered Mark, feeling hurt. "I only wanted to be of use to you, as you seem so interested in the girl. Do what you like about it, but do not see her for my sake."

Carl had listened to this little discussion in silence; he realized by what Mark said that he had some right to control Vashti's actions, and a malicious idea came to him—that he would repay Mark for many slights by paying court to Vashti, whom he really greatly admired; and being a general lover he found it easy to fix his fancy upon anyone he could admire.

It was terribly slow at Balmfield he found, and he was going to look up sport at the lighthouse, till Vashti's news stopped him; so now he politely asked permission to walk back to the Naze with Mark and Vashti, saying he wished to see Major Paget on a matter of business.

"Do not let me detain you then," said Mark, stiffly, "we do not intend to return yet—we are going to call at the rectory."

Vashti looked surprised but said nothing, and with a slow smile that was too lazy to get to his eyes, Carl lifted his hat and left them, with a courteous "Good morning."

"I wish you had not said we were going to the rectory; the matter will be vexed. I promised to write a lot of letters for her."

"I suppose you wanted to walk with that man-cat?"

"You suppose nothing of the sort, Mark; you are not so silly."

"Indeed, then, I am silly enough to object to your carrying his flowers; why did you accept them?"

"Because I love roses, and if I had not taken them he would have thrown them into the sea."

"He said that, did he? 'Tis a pity he does not know you belong to me."

"I could hardly tell him, could I? It would look as though I was vain enough to imagine he would feel interested."

"But you might make him understand without speaking. Look black at him; give him the cold shoulder."

"Do be sensible, Mark; you know I cannot be uncivil."

"You could if you liked; you'd soon find a way if he were old and ugly."

"Indeed I should not. I am fond of old folks. You are spoiling this beautiful morning by your ill-temper, Mark, and making me feel so miserable. Come, be a pal, don't keep me out in the cold any longer; you have punished me enough for being civil to Mr. Gonther."

Mark looked down at the coaxing little hand that crept into his, and, in a softened mood, lifted it to his lips.

"I am afraid I punish both of us, dear, with my detestable temper, but when you are my wife I shall be satisfied, knowing no one dare come between us. When shall we be married, dearest? I wish you would have consented to be married on the same day as your mother. If you loved me as I do you, you would not want to wait."

Vashti lifted her serious eyes to his, and said, sadly,—

"You must learn to trust me before we become man and wife, Mark. I could not marry a man who was for ever doubting me; besides, we have not known each other long; let us wait; you may repent your bargain."

"No! I shall never repent; but you may. We have known each other long enough to love,

and surely we might marry. Your mother has known Lord Lexton no longer."

"Ah! but he is too old to lose time in wooing; he intends to do all his love-making after marriage he tells me."

"Very sensible of him; it is a pity everyone does not follow his example. But you see, darling, if you do not marry me soon I must leave you, and that will make us both very miserable. My work waits for me, and I must work to win a name my wife will be proud to wear."

"I can trust you, Mark, and you can come back to me. Of course I shall grieve over parting, but then there will be our meeting to look forward to!"

"What an icicle you are, Vashti! I don't believe you want to marry!"

"Yes I do!" she answered, with a divine blush.

Mark smiled, and said, putting his hand under her chin, and lifting her crimsoned face so that he might look into her true eyes,—

"If you want to marry me, why don't you do it, darling? 'Barkis is willing.' Now, I like to settle up as I go along to avoid mistakes and know how I stand; so tell me, best-beloved, when will you be my wife? I can't wait long; I want you to give me the chance of proving myself not such a bad sort of fellow, after all. Tell me, when will you let me be happy? name the day?"

Vashti's eyes met his impassioned gaze with equal fervour, and said,—

"Mark, dear, if you like I will marry you next Christmas."

"It's no use; I can't wait so long!"

"But you must, sir!"

"We'll see about that. I'll worry you into relenting."

Vashti shook her head, and said,—

"Why it is very soon to be married; we shall only be engaged a few months!"

"Bless me, Vashti! would you be engaged for ever? That would be like tying a table napkin under a man's chin and never giving him any dinner."

Vashti looked up in his face and said, a little sadly,—

"If I am worth having I am worth waiting for—you impatient, unreasonable darling!"

"I don't believe you love me, Vashti!"

"Yes you do, Mark. You must believe and feel it—know my very soul seems drawn to you. I love you with a love that has an ache in it, because of its intensity. 'Tis a bitter-sweet power you have over me. I yielded all the strength of my nature to you long ago, my master!"

Vashti was moved out of herself; her steel grey eyes sparkled like stars in a frosty sky, her lips parted and the breath came quickly. Love looked out from the eyes Mark loved, and called the light of his life—love that meant deathless devotion!

He could no longer pretend to doubt her, and when she bowed her head and kissed his strong brown hands, he said, gently,—

"I believe you now, my treasure! and will do anything you wish, so that it does not lessen your love for me, which to me is as the breath of life! Now I am going to be very sentimental; I want you to give me that tiny curl that lies on your neck here!"

He touched her soft, white neck, the rich waves of mingled light and shade were knotted up close at the back of her head; but a wee ring of gold lay on her neck. She smiled, and put her hand up to her head, saying,—

"That's my kiss curl; I don't think I can spare it; besides, 'tis unlucky to keep hair."

"Unlucky! what a flimsy boggy luck is! I tell you I must have the curl!"

"Wait till we get home and I'll give it you. What will you do with it? put it there?"

She pointed to a locket of dull gold that hung from his watch-chain. He opened it, and showed her a few wee blue blossoms; they were the flowers from the spray of speedwell she had given him the day he told her how dear she had become to him.

"You see there is room for the flowers and the hair, too, pet!"

"Yes, I see," said Vashti, softly, "and while you keep them it will seem as if my good wishes are always with you, bidding you speed-well."

CHAPTER XI.

"If you insist upon going to the lighthouse, to-night, Vashti, I must go with you, dear."

"No, no! indeed it is not necessary. My cousin Rex has offered to accompany me."

Vashti, who was kneeling in a window seat, dressed in a pale, primrose-coloured gown of some soft, clinging material, that was cut square at the throat, and had elbow sleeves, looked very lovely. She had fixed a bunch of red roses in her bosom, and some nestled in the sunny waves of her hair. Never had Mark seen her look so well.

A jealous throb of love told him that she must look fair in other eyes than his.

They were standing in the shade of the gloaming grey, and Vashti's fair, pale face showed like a white flower; the inky fringes of her eyes were lowered and she seemed troubled, for her full, red lips quivered like a grieved child's.

Mark, who was sitting looking into her face with adulous love, pressed a burning kiss upon her white throat; as he did this, he felt the cool fresh touch of the roses.

"I will not have you carry that fellow's favours about you, Vashti. You should not have worn his flowers. I cannot bear that anything his hands have touched should lay upon your beautiful flesh. Take them off."

"Poor roses! they are beautiful, and the first I have had this year."

She took them from her breast regretfully, and gave them to Mark, who threw them out of the window.

The cool evening air blew in upon the lovers, and Mark said, anxiously,—

"How foolish I am to let you stand there with the window open and your chest uncovered! You'll take cold; let me close the window."

"No, please don't, my head aches; the house seems to stifle me!"

"Poor, pretty head! what makes it ache?" said Mark, smoothing the silky, rippling hair back from her low, broad forehead tenderly.

The very touch of his hand seemed like a caress. Vashti took it in both her own and pressed it against her cheek. Her heart was very heavy; she longed to let Mark share her burden, but had given a promise of secrecy, and she was too loyal and true to forget her promise.

"You don't seem quite happy, darling; is anything troubling you?" said Mark, drawing her into his arms.

"Trouble me! what should trouble me, while I have your love and you, silly old pet? You must not fancy I am in trouble because a headache makes me look dismal. We white-faced women look ill if our fingers ache!"

"Vashti, do you know you are getting very lovely? Every day you seem to blossom and brighten like a budding rose!"

"Hush, sweetheart! 'tis only in your eyes, and their sight is glorified by love. I know you love me, Mark, and that knowledge is a great happiness. I think if anything parted us now it would kill me!"

"Nothing will part us, pet, while we both keep faith."

Vashti sighed; it was so hard to know of the hidden shadows that might spoil their future!

The moon rose slowly, like an indolent beauty who tarries late enough to be longed for, and the silver radiance lighted up Vashti's earnest face, and Mark's resolute look of lasting love.

Vashti felt a strange repugnance to her task that night; and when Major Paget came in, and took in the whole scene, he felt sorry for the girl who had borne the burden of others with such uncomplaining patience and silence. He wished he had not to disturb her, but it

was getting late, so he said going to her side, quietly,—

"Come Vashti, if we are going we ought to off, 'tis getting late."

Vashti put her hand in Mark's, and said, softly,—

"Good-bye, darling, I shall not be long away. Suppose you employ yourself in writing the letters you were talking about before dinner."

"I will, pet; then I can give all my time to you when you come back."

"Wrap up, it will be cold on the sea; and remember you have promised not to go near enough to the girl to catch her complaint. The best thing you can do is to smoke one of your naughty little cigarettes. Here are some, and some matches, and a tiny flask of brandy. See how I think about you!"

He took the articles in question out of his pocket and gave them to her—a little silver cigarette case and match-box to match; evidently he did not object to her smoking.

Rex smiled; it was a new experience to him to have his house full of lovers. He had left Beryl and Lord Lexton playing billiards, and now he found Vashti and Mark "spooning" in the moonlight.

When Vashti and he were walking towards the shore, the major said: "It's hard for you to be worried like this, child; trouble for others is spoiling the best-time of your life. I shall be glad to see you married."

"I can never marry, Rex, till I can confide all my troubles to my husband. I said I would marry at Christmas, but do not know if it will be possible; certainly not unless Percy gets well, and finds a place of safety. You see, mamma will not let me tell Mark, because he is so nearly related to Lord Lexton; and she is so afraid his lordship would not marry her if he knew her son's story. It is all very wretched, and I am heartily tired of concealment, yet what can I do, situated as I am?"

"Nothing, poor child! but be patient, and hope for happier times. I wish that fellow Carl Gonthier would go away from here."

"So do I. I dislike him more than any man I know."

A smooth, soft voice said, as the red light of a cigar showed through the gloom of the cliff shadows. "Am I mistaken, or is this Miss Paget?"

"Yes, it is I, Mr. Gonthier. I did not expect to see you here to-night."

"No, I suppose not; but I was anxious to know if you would be foolish enough to go to the lighthouse to-night."

"Miss Paget is always foolish enough to be charitable even to her enemies," said Major Paget.

"Now you flatter me, Rex; for I can be a right down good hater," said Vashti, a ring of excitement in her fresh young voice. She was bitterly vexed that this man had dared to watch her, yet knew it would be insane of her to make an open enemy of him. The major, too, was indignant, that after receiving hush money Carl should have the audacity to keep up a semblance of friendship, so he said, shortly, "Sir, I understood that when you received the five hundred pounds my cousin was foolish enough to give you, as price of your silence, respecting an unfortunate transaction on her son's part, that you intended to leave here at once. As man to man, I think it is hardly honourable of you to remain here, playing the part of a spy, and laying us open to much misconception among our friends by your attention to Miss Paget."

A low, amused laugh answered this speech; and Carl said, meaningly, "Unforeseen events have arisen that make it my business and pleasure to remain at Balmfield. I am sorry if my presence is an inconvenience to you. As to playing the part of spy, that is all nonsense. What is there in life at Paget Nose for anyone to spy into? Sir, you wrong me; I received the five hundred pounds as price of my silence; I have kept the contract. I have been silent, and kept the secret of my brother's murder."

"Oh! hush! please," said Vashti, "Rex, let us go, we are wasting time. The tide is low now; we can get to the lighthouse easily, let us go. Good-night, Mr. Gonthier!"

"May I go with you?"

"No; Dickie's home is not open to the public at all times. We are old friends, and will go alone. If he wishes to see you he will bring the boat back," said Vashti, putting her hand in her cousin's and making him run down the beach with her.

The moonlight lay on the sea, making a path of light, and in that path Carl could see the little boat skimming the waves like a sea-fowl. In a few seconds it was close to the shore. Carl saw Vashti walk over the sands and spring in, followed by Major Paget. He recognized Dickie's hat and coat, but fancied the figure looked small for the old man. He stood and watched the boat away with an evil look in his black eyes.

"I will be even with them yet!" he thought. "There is more in this friendship between these Pagets and Dickies. I have a strong suspicion that Master Percy is troubling them again. I wish he would come home. I suppose that girl Hero warned him to keep away, or he would have been here. I do not intend to leave here till I know where my fine friend is. They fear me; ah! and have good cause."

In the lighthouse old Dickie watched for Hero's return; he had gout in his bad leg, and was quite unable to go ashore himself. They were very badly placed, for Hero, who was supposed to be ill, was the only one who could take an active part in affairs at the lighthouse. Dickie was glad to hear her cheerily "All right, dad!" as she fastened up the boat, and then followed her friends upstairs.

"Oh, dad! I do hope you have not left him alone long!"

"No, lass; but he was anxious and bade me come out and watch for you."

Major Paget could not but admire Hero's bright eyes and pink cheeks as she took off Dickie's hat and let down all the wealth of her rippling golden hair.

"No wonder Percy loved her," he thought; "she is fair enough to make a man forget all the world—everything but her sweet self. Such pluck and spirit she has, though she does look so fragile and fairy-like."

"I will go and prepare him to see you," said Hero, throwing aside the disfiguring coat, and displaying a prettily flounced pink dress that looked like the petals of a rose.

Hero went into a tiny room, where a light burned brightly; it was a neat little chamber, full of such tasteful trifles as a cultured woman loves.

On the white bed lay a young man of about twenty—a man with great pathetic brown eyes and curly dark hair. His face was refined and delicate as a woman's, and the hands clasped under his dark head were soft and small as a girl's. He looked desperately ill and weary, but the glad lovelight leapt to his eyes as Hero came and knelt down by the bed, and laying her cheek against his, said with yearning fondness,—

"Your sister and cousin are here, Percy, but before I let you see them you must promise on your honour not to let their visit excite you."

"I do promise, *petite*. I should be an ungrateful fellow to undo by my own indiscretion the good your devoted nursing has done me. The sea breeze has kissed the colour into your dear face. How I envy the sea breeze. My caresses kill the rose-bloom; care for me makes those dimpled cheeks like lilies. Run away, I long to see Vashti's honest face; she is a sister worth having—true as steel, tender as a mother, more tender than some."

He sighed, for he was still young enough to long for his mother's presence in his sick-room.

Hero ran away, and stood chatting with the major while so that brother and sister might meet alone. Vashti knelt as Hero had done by the bed-

side, tears of compassion in her eyes at sight of her brother's changed face.

"Poor darling! you have been ill. Where is all your beautiful silky beard that mamma was so proud of?"

"I cut it off to alter my face after—after that awful time when I fled—I knew not whither—to hide myself."

He shuddered and hid his face in his thin hands. Vashti drew them away gently, and kissed his face.

"Oh! Vashti, I am not fit to receive your pure caresses. I, a poor outcast among my fellow-men. I was better away at the war; but I was one of the first to be wounded; then I lay in an awful place, and suffered torment. I prayed to die, and never a man prayed for life, but death is destined to such wretches as I. In those long watches when I was racked with pain I used to fancy Herman Gonther came back in spirit to stroke me, and that was worst of all."

"It was madness to come back here, Percy!"

"Yes, I know it; but my heart was here. Vashti, and I thought I was going to die, and I could not die till Hero had given me her smiling beautiful young life. How she loves me! She has been like an angel to me, and I such a burden. I cannot be all bad, Vashti, or I could not keep her love."

"Bad! of course you are not bad, poor unhappy boy; what you did was done in your mad temper. Try not to think of it now—think only how best to keep your presence among us secret, for our mother's sake. She is to be married so soon now; it would be cruel to spoil her happiness by any new anxiety."

"So the master has found a market for her beauty. Well, well, there are women and women! I can't fancy you having two husbands, Vashti."

"I should hope not, indeed! But come, tell me your plans."

"I have none; I thought I should come home to die in my darling's arms, and instead it seems Heaven has reserved me for a different fate. I creep here sick unto death, with no thought or desire but to see my darling's face, and die forgiven for all the pain she had borne for me."

"Instead, you must get well, and go away from England, and take her away with you as your wife."

"My wife!—I dare not ask it; think what it would be to rear white-robed children who might learn at any time that their father is a murderer!"

"But, darling, why brood over an irretrievable misdeed? You did not mean to kill the poor fellow; it was an accident done in self-defence. If you had not taken the pistol away he would have shot you."

"Perhaps not. Herman's mad passions fell as suddenly as they arose. Oh! it was all too horrible to be borne with reason, and I had been so fond of him. We were like brothers till I discovered he was not the honourable upright fellow I believed him to be."

"How came you to quarrel?"

"It arose through a disagreement about a girl he was leading away, whom I warned. Then he cheated at cards, and I called him a swindler. So he was, for he had won from me largely. I was mad that night I think—mad with wine and excitement. I wish it had been I who had died! Won't my mother come to see me, Vashti?"

"She does not know you are here, dear; we want to spare her the anxiety. You know how she suffers from her heart, and she is bothered too much as it is. You would not make her miserable I know, dear, would you?"

"No; I am selfish enough, but not so bad as that. I wish to see her naturally; but I will not persist if you think it will do her injury. Rex is waiting, is he not? Call him in, dear; I am so easily tired I may not have strength to talk to him."

Rex came in quietly, and sat down by the bedside, pressing Percy's hands in silence.

"It was good of you to come, Rex; but

when were you not good to us all? I have forfeited all claim to your consideration, still you do not tire of being kind to me."

"And never shall, boy, for your mother's sake. I suppose you want money; I can't get much, for I have just paid Carl Gonther five hundred pounds for keeping our secret."

Percy sprang up in bed, his eyes ablaze, his cheeks crimson.

"Good Heavens! is Herman's twin-brother here?"

"Yes, he is at Balmfield."

"Do not trust him; he will betray me."

"Is it likely I would risk your safety, Percy? You are weak and ill, and must not allow yourself to get so excited. I don't believe anyone would recognise you. You look like a delicate woman."

Vashti's eyes sparkled.

"Oh! Rex, I have an idea that we might get Percy away from here, when he is well enough, disguised as a woman; my clothes will fit him."

"Not a bad idea, Vashti; we will think it over. Meanwhile we must think how best to secure his safety here."

Then followed a serious discussion about ways and means; after which Vashti and Rex left him to try to renew his strength by sleep.

CHAPTER XX.

JUNE roses glorified the beautiful world, and Beryl's wedding-day had come. Only a few old friends were asked to celebrate it.

Major Paget had given Beryl a stylish silver-grey satin dress that suited her superb figure to perfection; a large group of lovely white roses were fixed on her shoulder, and she carried a fragrant bunch of the same in her hand.

Vashti wore a graceful dress of cream-tinted muslin, heavily trimmed with lace and pale blue silk; she looked very lovely but anxious, and the same worried expression was in Rex's usually jolly face.

The bride herself and Lord Lexton looked happy, and Mark Frost was in one of his merry moods.

The Rector of Balmfield, Mr. Rotise, performed the ceremony, and Barbara looked quite nice in a fashionable dress trimmed with ruby-coloured velvet.

Rex looked at her good, plain face, and felt his heart rested as she smiled back at him brightly. Rex and Barbara were old friends; he had known her when she was a rough-headed, freckled school-girl—a terrible tom-boy, but sunny-tempered and fearless as a boy.

While the marriage service was being read in the solemn hush of the quaint old church a strange scene was being enacted at the light-house.

Percy had so far recovered as to be able to be up and dressed; and Hero, wan and white from anxiety, was free to perform her domestic duties. They could hear the wedding-bells at Balmfield float over the tranquil summer sea.

"You might venture out a bit in the sunshine, dearest, the fresh air will do you good," said Hero, as she stooped a second to press a kiss on Percy's sunken cheek. "I will put the dad's chair outside for you."

She hastily did so, and taking her father's hat and reefing jacket from a peg, she made Percy put them on, and go out in the sunshine.

A sigh of satisfaction at sight of the blue sky, shining waters, and warm sunshine, escaped the poor fellow's lips, and laying his handsome head back on Hero's bosom, he looked up and said—

"My Hero, how can I thank you for snatching me out of the valley of shadows and letting me look upon this beautiful world again? I am almost well now, darling, and with Heaven's help, hope to get away to another country to make a home. How good, how precious you are, darling! Were it not for your dear love I should have no wish to linger out my life under a cloud, as I must. Do you hear

the joy-bells, darling, and does not your heart ache for all the promise that has passed away, because of my sin? Oh! when I see your dear face pale with sorrow and know how cruelly my love has shadowed your life, I hate myself, and wish I had never lived to return to plague you. But you know, darling, I did not think it possible I could recover, or I would have stayed away, but I could not die without your forgiveness!"

"Hush! Percy. Why reproach yourself for what I would not have lost to gain a world! It has been my blessed privilege to tend you and help you back to health. Think how I love you! how lonely I have been without you, and what happiness it has been to be of use to you! A woman's greatest joy is to be near—to be of use to her beloved! Love is a woman's world; her thoughts do not go beyond it. What were life to me without your love? Do not fret for me, the cloud will blow over and you will be true. Meanwhile, I have father to love and care for me; and he is a king for cleverness when one wants comforting or is lonely. Hear him now, dear, jolly, old chap, singing while he trims his lamps—singing as if he had not a care in the world!"

Tom's voice had a little painful trill in it as he sang, while rubbing his lamps "Sally in our alley."

"There's not a lady in the land
That's half so sweet as Sally;"

sang he.

Hero looked towards the shore, and saw a boat put out with only one occupant, and, shading the sun from her eyes, Hero looked at him. Something in his appearance disturbed her. Hastily disengaging herself from Percy's hold she ran in, got Tom's telescope, and looked at the boat that was rapidly skimming the waves. A cry of fear escaped her, and quickly running to her father, she said—

"Father, what shall we do? I can see Carl Gonther coming rapidly towards us; he is suspicious. How can we blind him?"

The old fellow's hands shook, as he put down the oil-can he held, and said—

"Give me a minute to think, girl. We must throw dust in his eyes somehow. He has no right to come spying here. Let Percy into your room! he must not be found here, poor boy! You have not a moment to lose; he may have seen him here!"

"He could not know him from you, wrapped up as he was in your clothes. Here, Percy, quick! come in; take off that hat and coat, let father put them on and sit as you sat, while you run and hide in my room. Get under the bed—quick! Carl Gonther will be here in a moment, and if he finds you, all is lost!"

Percy clenched his fist in despairing rage and did her bidding, while the joy-bells rang out gleefully as though mocking his misery.

Tom, with an angry gleam in his eyes, said—

"Give me the jacket, lad!" and hastily getting into it, sat down with a newspaper on his knee and his pipe in his mouth, the very picture of ease and comfort.

Hero quickly put a night-dress over her frock, and slipped into bed, her heart beating furiously. The white flounce that surrounded her bed hid Percy from view, but she was in an agony of fear that she would be discovered.

Tom, who had always walked with a stout stick, grasped it angrily as he heard Carl fasten his boat to its moorings and ascend the ladder, singing some gay little French song.

"Chantez, chantez, un bello,
Chantez, chantez, toujours!"

sang Carl, as he put his foot on the landing place and took in Tom's easy attitude with keen mistrust.

"Good-morning, Dickie; how's your daughter?"

"Better sir, thank you—greatly better."
"I am glad of that. I want to fetch my letters from the post-office to-day, and heard the post-mistress say, 'Here are letters for the lighthouse, I wonder who I can get to take them there. Hero Dickie is not yet well



[VASETTI'S JEALOUS LOVER.]

enough to fetch them,' and, being an id'e man, I said, 'Give them to me, ma'am, I am going for a row, and will leave them for you,' and knowing I belong to what she calls the gentry, the good lady trusted me and sent them on. See! here they are, two—one for you with the government seal, another for a certain Sergeant Tyrrell. May I ask who Sergeant Tyrrell is?"

Dickie's keen eye had a humorous twinkle as he answered, pocketing the letter, "Certainly sir, I am honoured by your interest. Sergeant Tyrrell is my son—a soldier, who has won promotion in the East, fighting with the blue-jackets."

"Indeed! you ought to be proud of him."

"I am, sir, as a soldier, but as a son—bah! he is a black sheep! the plague and worry of my old age. Hero swears by him, and had him here and cared for him as though he were all the world to her, till she fell ill, then he went off on the spree."

Carl Gonthier felt puzzled. He had felt so sure Sergeant Tyrrell was Percy Paget, yet there seemed no reason to doubt Dickie, who smoked his pipe with a quiet air of enjoyment, while he thought, "Heaven forgive me! I never thought I could be such a thorough-faced liar!"

"How is it your son does not bear his proper name; there is no disgrace in being a soldier? In my country all men are soldiers, and are proud of it."

"So I have heard, sir; but here 'tis different. They are looked upon in England as necessary evils, slighted and ignored till there is war; then like neglected children, who are dressed up and petted because their mother has company, they are made much of for a time; then, when the company has gone, they are scolded back to their obscurity. When our soldiers are treated with the respect they deserve, ours will be the most glorious army in the world. Now 'tis a disgrace to a man to be in the rank and file; and if a man has decent parents he joins, as my boy did, under an assumed name."

When the nation treats her noble defenders as men, and brave ones too, then our soldiers will not have their strength from the scum of the earth, and England will breed a race of heroes; and to be called a soldier of England will be the most envied title under heaven!"

"You are enthusiastic, Tom."

"I am, sir, for I am a true born Englishman."

"For he himself hath said it,
And its greatly to his credit
That he is an Englishman."

sang Carl. Then laying his hand on Dickie's arm, he said, with sudden gravity, "Dickie, my friend, I respect you as an honest man, and a British tar. I am about to put a serious question to you—one you will resent, but in the cause of justice I cannot avoid it. Is this Sergeant Tyrrell Percy Paget in disguise? I know he loved Hero and was betrothed to her, and have traced him to Balmfield, and there lost scent. I have cause to suspect you and Hero of hiding him, and come here to-day to ask you to clear yourself of suspicion!"

Tom clutched his stick fiercely. This was carrying war into the enemy's camp with a vengeance. He longed to pitch this presuming fellow into the sea.

"What can I do to clear myself of suspicion, sir?"

"Allow me to search the place!"

"Pray do so, there is nothing we fear. We live so near heaven here, sir, our lives must by sympathy be blameless. Follow me, you will not have far to search. But mark me, Mr. Foreigner, if that poor boy were alive, and came to me for shelter, and you were after him, I'd think no more of throwing you into the sea, and making you food for the gulls, than I should of knocking out my pipe so! See what a way the 'baccy has to go before it can float ashore!"

"Ah! my good fellow, I see! I like your ardour. Lead on, if there is nothing hidden there can be no fear of finding."

Tom led him through his few rooms, showed him everything there was to be seen. All was scrupulously clean and neat. Nothing but a soldier's belt rewarded the search, till Dickie paused outside Hero's chamber; then he drew a long breath, and said, drawing himself up proudly: "Sir, this is my daughter's chamber; she is ill here. My Hero is a pure good girl—as pure and good as the fair girl Virginus butchered to save her from the d—d lust of his superiors. This chamber has been a sort of altar in this home—a place for pure prayers, and angel-guarded sleep. A pure, young virgin lies within—no man save her old father and the good old doctor has seen Hero in her sanctuary. A good girl is very like a little child—'tis natural that those who love her should guard her from all evil. It goes against me to show my Hero's innocent bed to you; but if you insist, and demand the sight, for justice sake, I'll show you it; but Heaven forgive you if the sacred sight bred aught but pity in your heart! She is ill, sir, and I entreat that you be silent and do not shock her by a word!"

Dickie opened the door of Hero's room—a neat, white nest of a place, full of sunbeams. Hero lay back with wide-opened eyes, and fever-flushed cheeks, the wind from the windows tossing her loosened golden hair in her eyes.

"Oh! father, how could you let that man come into my room!" she said, hastily sitting up in bed.

(To be continued.)

At a recent divorce trial the wife was asked a question to which she made the following reply: "When I was first married I was so jealous of my husband that I thought every woman I saw wanted him, and now I wonder how I ever could have been such a fool as to have wanted him myself."



["PAPA," CRIED MAY; "DO NOT GO AND LEAVE ME IN THIS BLEAK WORLD ALONE. I CANNOT BEAR IT."]

NOVELLETTE.]

FOR LOVE ONLY.

CHAPTER I.

THE BANKER'S HEIRESS.

A HOUSE at Staines—a quaint, many-windowed, gabled residence, shut in by high walls from the too intrusive gaze of the passer-by, and with wide, picturesque grounds, sloping down to the river's bank; an unpretentious place enough, and yet bearing every mark of its owner's wealth. The velvet grass of the lawns, the luxuriance of blossoms in the conservatory, the beautiful order of all that met the eye, told of an expensive head-gardener, and his train of clever assistants.

Within all was the same. No pomp or grandeur—no meaningless show; yet nothing that could please the taste or captivate the senses was wanting. Through a grand old hall you passed to the drawing-room, whose walls were almost hidden by mirrors of Venetian glass, between which were stands of rare old china. The furniture was pale blue and ebony, the carpet of velvet pile. One glance told you it was a rich man's house; and told you truly, for Sir John Graham, Bart., was what is called on 'Change a "safe man." He was the head of the great banking-house of Graham and Mortimer; and, besides Meadowview, and his Yorkshire property with its revenues, he drew from the business in Lombard-street, it was said, not less than twenty thousand pounds a-year. Twenty thousand pounds a-year, and no son to succeed him in his wealth or honours at his death! The Meadowview, Yorkshire estates, and title, would pass to a distant—an almost unknown—cousin; and for the share in the great banking-house and all his funded property there was no claimant but a slight, graceful girl, with oval cheeks and large brown velvety eyes, who, people said, was the only creature on earth Sir John really loved.

In truth, Sir John did something more than love her. From the moment she had been put into his arms, a motherless baby of a few hours' old, he had almost worshipped May. From a child, no wish of hers had been ungratified. For her sake he had heaped up riches; for her sake he still kept his position in the great banking house of Graham and Mortimer. With her his hopes and thoughts began and ended.

It was a lovely August afternoon. May had wandered through the grounds to the river's bank. She had stretched herself lazily under a tree, the broad-brimmed hat fallen disregarded to her feet; her dark eyes fixed on the clear waters, and her thoughts very far away.

"It is all very beautiful," said the girl, half aloud, recalling herself by an effort. "Oh! how I wish I had been a boy, and then I need never have left Meadowview. Why should it belong to a fourth or fifth cousin we have never even seen? I think it is decidedly unjust; and if I were the Queen—"

But what Miss Graham would have done had she been transformed into Her Most Gracious Majesty must remain uncertain. The sound of footsteps roused her and she started up. Doubtless it was her father returning; she must go to meet him. Never yet had Sir John come home to find her absent.

Her hat hanging idly on her arm, she turned towards the house. A moment more and she was face to face with her father and a stranger.

The banker's heiress blushed. For a rich man's only child she was singularly unused to society. True, at stated intervals formal dinner-parties were given at Meadowview. True, the Mortimers visited them occasionally without an invitation; but Sir John's friends were, for the most part, busy City men, who talked of banking or the Stock Exchange. One glance told the girl this stranger was of another world. The set of his tie, the flower in his button-hole, told her as much.

"Lord Carlyon—my daughter. May, this is

Lord Carlyon; he is one of our nearest Yorkshire neighbours, you know."

May returned the stranger's bow and smiled a gracious welcome.

"I don't like York-hire much," she said, simply. "We hardly ever go there. Are you more faithful to your tenants, Lord Carlyon?"

The young viscount was vexed at the question. He deserted his Yorkshire home quite as entirely as Sir John Graham; but from widely different reasons the baronet could never forget that it was where he brought his young wife a bride, and where he buried her barely a year later. Lord Carlyon's estate was mortgaged to the hilt, and the shooting on his moors let each season to whoever would purchase it; but he could not explain this to Miss Graham. He had deemed it a lucky chance when he met Sir John that afternoon, and the latter invited him home. Might he not in the course of time extract a loan from this wealthy neighbour! Yet another idea came to him as he stood there and saw the August sunshine falling on May's uncovered head—that a good way of redeeming his encumbered acres would be by wooing the banker's heiress.

"I do not wonder you forget Yorkshire," he said, gently, "when you have such a home here."

"You like Meadowview?"

"It seems to me a beautiful spot."

May looked up into his face with her wonderful brown eyes.

"I love it dearly!" she said, gently. "I don't think any other place could be the same to me."

"Have you lived here long?"

"Even since I can remember."

Lord Carlyon sauntered along at her side, wondering why, in all the gaities of the late season, he had never met this perfect face. Sir John unconsciously explained the enigma.

"You won't have so much time for Meadowview next year, child; remember your aunt's threats."

May made a little *mon* of discontent.

Lord Carlyon laughed outright.

"Are they so very terrible, Miss Graham?"

"Dreadfully!"

"She is a foolish girl. My sister, Lady Merton, comes down now and then to try and keep us in order, and she has wrung from me a reluctant consent that May shall be presented next spring. She wished it to have been last April, but we both cried out for a year's respite."

"And you don't look forward to your debut?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Society has no charms for you. Operas, balls, theatres; do you expect pleasure from them?"

"We go to the opera every year, I make papa take me night after night; and we always see the best things at the theatre. Papa drives with me in the park; and we ride together in the Row. It seems to me we have all the pleasures of the season already, and escape its bores."

"But society?"

"I have quite enough of that," said May, quaintly. "Every now and then we have a dinner-party, and it is so prosy I always feel inclined to go to sleep."

"I cannot believe that."

"Which? that the dinner parties are prosy, or that I want to go to sleep?"

"The first."

"Come and see," she said. "We have another next week; papa will be delighted to invite you."

"And papa's daughter?"

"It won't make it any worse," she said, with painful frankness.

He felt annoyed. Geoffrey Viscount Carlyon was not accustomed to be treated so cavalierly; he whom the belles of the season had smiled upon to be abridged by a girl hardly out of the schoolroom. Heiress or no heiress he would not stand it. And then he remembered the necessities of Carlyon Towers and the many thousands which must come to Sir John's daughter. Besides, how beautiful she was; in a few years' time she would be the loveliest woman in London!

She did not keep them long alone; in a very few minutes she re-entered the drawing-room, and Geoffrey almost started with admiration. He had called her beautiful before, yet he had never guessed she could look so irresistibly attractive. And yet her dress was simple in the extreme, so simple that it was the more striking—a princess' robe of some heavy, white material falling in loose folds around her supple, girlish figure and confined at the waist by a broad silver girdle; a chain of silver at her neck supported a Maltese cross, and the open, hanging sleeves showed the delicate wrists almost covered with silver bangles. No trace of colour broke the harmony of her white attire except a single rose of a dark crimson shade fastened carelessly in the bodice of her dress.

"She is worthy a duke's coronet!" thought Geoffrey, and then he found himself offering her his arm and taking her into dinner.

He was surprised to find that the two who lived such a retired life talked easily and with interest on all the subjects of the day. May showed that even if she denounced society she was well versed in its doings. She had been to the Academy and discussed its contents with able criticism.

The one foible which appeared in her impressed Lord Carlyon rather favourably than otherwise. She evidently possessed a considerable amount of pride, gentle as she seemed.

Geoffrey saw that, far beyond wealth or luxury, she valued her gentle blood; that she gloried in being a Graham of Grahamville, while she cared little for being the heiress of one of the largest banking-houses in London.

"What a lucky thing she is well off," he thought, carelessly. "She is too gently reared for poverty, and she would never stoop to marry a *nouveau riche* had he the mines of Golconda!"

The gentlemen did not linger over their wine, but soon followed May into the pleasant lamp-lit drawing-room.

"I am sure you sing," said Geoffrey, going up to his young hostess, and taking a cup of coffee from her hands.

There was no hesitation in her answer.

"Yes."

"Then you will let us hear you?"

She crossed the room to the piano and seated herself. Geoffrey loved music almost passionately. For a moment he felt he should be disappointed. What could this girl, with her strange bringing up, know of music? He need not have feared. A few soft, rich chords, and then in a clear, powerful voice, whose every note was full of harmony, she began an old Scotch ballad.

"Ye haud a' trace of bonny doon."

Geoffrey listened in breathless silence until she had finished; he was about to express his eager thanks when he noticed a suspicious moisture about the big brown eyes.

"It is a lovely song," he said, gently; "but, forgive me, it is too sad for you."

"Why?"

It seemed to him that this young lady had the most remarkable knack of asking downright questions. This was their first meeting, and already she cross-examined him quite naturally.

"Why?" repeated May.

"You are too young and happy to think of sorrow; your life should be all sunshine."

"It is all sunshine," repeated May, simply.

"Do you know, Lord Carlyon, in all my life I have never known a sorrow—have never felt one shadow of a grief! I think sometimes it is a dreadful thing for me."

"It is a very happy thing!"

"But supposing I am having all my sunshine now—that the next twenty years of my life are all clouds—how shall I bear them?"

"Clouds will never touch you, Miss Graham; you will find people only too ready to smooth your way for you."

"I do not want anyone to do that; I have papa."

Geoffrey looked at her with a strange light in his blue eyes—a smile of wonderful sweetness playing about his mouth. She was so innocent, so unconscious of any affection, save that she had for her father. Would it be his happy task to awaken that sleeping heart—to teach those brown eyes to shine with love?

"You are laughing at me, Lord Carlyon."

"I could not," he said, earnestly. "I was only thinking, Miss Graham."

"About me?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"I should offend you."

"No, I would rather hear."

"I was thinking Sir John would not always be all powerful in your life; that a day must come when someone else would be nearer to you."

To his surprise she did not attempt to misunderstand him; she never blushed or hesitated.

"I shall never marry anyone," she said. "Papa and I shall always be as we are now," and then she rose from the music-stool, and walked across to his side.

That was the picture Lord Carlyon carried away with him—the baronet's stately figure and grave, earnest face, the girl in the first bloom of her womanhood, one hand resting on his shoulder, a world of tenderness for him shining in her brown eyes.

"She shall be mine!" decided Geoffrey, as he walked through the quaint old town on his way to the railway station. "With her grace and beauty she would honour any rank. I little thought, when Sir John brought me to Meadowview, what was in store. For the sake of Carlyon I could have married a plain woman, but such a sacrifice will not be needed, for once interest and inclination can go hand-in-hand. Will she love me? No woman ever yet frowned on my advances; May will not be the first. I shall win that imperious, wayward

heart, and that sweet brown head will find its home on my shoulder. Heigho! I am positively getting sentimental."

"Did you like Lord Carlyon, May?"

This point-blank question rather discomposd Miss Graham; she hesitated.

"I know so little of him, dear."

"I have asked him to come again; I think he will do so. Shall you be pleased to see him?"

"Very!" admitted May. "He is not like the Mortimers and their set, papa."

"Theodore Mortimer is a gentleman, May."

"Maybe," said the heiress, lightly; "but there is a flavour of trade about him, as though he was not quite used to his present position. Now, Lord Carlyon is different; you know at once that he comes of a noble family."

"I cannot think what has given you such conservative notions, May. Trade is honest and honourable; to it our country owes—"

May stuffed her fingers in her ears.

"Spare me, papa—spare me! Trade may be everything delightful, but anyone engaged in trade is positively odious. I don't believe people in trade have the same feelings—the same code of honour as we have."

"May!"

There was no mistaking the reproach in his voice. She kissed him fondly.

"Why need you mind my saying it? The Grahams are not in trade, not one of them would have lowered himself to such a thing!"

Sir John let the remark pass.

"I can't think where you got your notions," he said, almost fretfully.

"They were born with me, I think, papa. Aunt Linda always praised me for them."

"Aunt Linda is an idiot!"

May felt aggrieved; she was not used to such a reception of her remarks.

"I think you are very cross, dear," she said, plaintively. "Why, you take up the cudgels so for tradespeople I can't think, but you know I'd do anything in the world to please you. Shall I tell Sims to ask the baker's young man and the butcher's assistant to dine with you to-morrow, and send a line to my dreamer begging her to spend the day with me?"

"May!"—laughing in spite of himself—"you really are quite incorrigible about this."

"Quite," said Miss Graham, firmly; "but, there, I have made you laugh so I don't care a bit."

But she would have asked could she have seen the shadow which settled on his face when she had left him for the night, and he went into a little room called his study. The banker opened a small black bag he had brought that day from his office, took from it a goodly bundle of papers, and drawing a chair to his writing-table, commenced to study them.

Far on into the night he sat there, and the grey dawn of morning had come, when, pale and haggard, he at last rose and began to think of retiring.

"My little May!" came from his lips, with a bitter groan. "May Heaven help her; it will fall hardest upon her. Oh! my child! my darling! would that I could die for you! It was a strange chance my meeting young Carlyon to-day. How struck he seemed with May! If that could be a match my worst anxiety would be relieved. He is not rich; but what right have I to expect a wealthy son-in-law? And she cares less for fortune than for rank; as Lady Carlyon she would be safe; a husband's love and care would ward off much of the bitterness of the blow! Oh! May! my darling! the apple of my eye, to think that I should look forward to parting from you with positive relief!"

But despite his impassioned regrets, despite that long nocturnal watch, he was in his place at the breakfast-table punctually at half-past nine the next morning—May in the daintiest of pink gingham, a mass of naxon flounces and white lace; stood at his side, with her own hands fastening a late rosebud in his button-hole.

"Stay at home," she pleaded. "It is much too hot for you to go Lombard-street; and, besides, I want you!"

"Business first, little girl," replied May. "Why can't Mr. Mortimer see to it?"

"I prefer my own head to his. Take care of yourself, May. If Lord Carlyon should call with that music he spoke of, I shall be home at five."

For Geoffrey had craved permission to bring Miss Graham some songs which he felt sure would just suit her voice.

May nodded.

"He won't come," said May. But nevertheless she was just the least bit disappointed when the afternoon passed without bringing him.

Two more days came and went with the same result; at last, on the fourth, just as Miss Graham had decided he never meant to come at all, the servant announced him.

She had not expected visitors. She was sitting in a shady corner of the drawing-room, still in her pink gingham, diligently occupied in needlework; the said work was neither elegant nor ornamental, being nothing more or less than a rough woollen petticoat designed for a village *protégée* in the coming winter.

"I thought you had forgotten all about them," she said, as Lord Carlyon presented the songs.

"I did not like to intrude upon you sooner," he answered, quickly. "Had I followed my own wishes I should have been here the afternoon after my first visit."

"Do you live in London?" inquired Miss Graham, abruptly.

"I don't live anywhere. I am that most wretched creature, a bachelor, Miss Graham."

"But you must live somewhere?"

"I sleep at my chambers at Clarges-street, and I dine at my club. You can't call that living anywhere, can you?"

"Yes," persisted May. "And are you all alone?"

"Completely. I have no near relations except my mother, and she lives in the country."

"Doesn't she want you with her?"

He shook his head.

"Our ways are too different. I should like you to see my mother, Miss Graham."

"She wouldn't like me."

"I am sure she would!"

"Old ladies never do."

"Did I say she was an old lady?"

"I thought she must be," said May, blushing.

"Because she is my mother you must have a strong belief in my antiquity, Miss Graham; as it happens, my mother is forty-seven and I am twenty-six, so we are neither of us quite venerable yet."

"Twenty-six sounds old."

"Compared to eighteen, perhaps. Have you forgotten your promise, Miss Graham?"

"What was it?"

"To show me your grounds. Don't you remember you told me they sloped down to the river's bank?"

She rose at once, took up her hat and led the way out through the French windows out into the gardens. Side by side the two walked on through paths, sweet with the scent of summer flowers, until a sudden curve brought them in sight of Father Thames, majestic in the tranquillity of his summer beauty.

"That is our boat," said May, pointing to one lying moored to a post near them. "Papa and I used often to go for long rows, but this summer he is always tired or too busy."

"Will you trust yourself to me?" asked Geoffrey, a little eagerly, not too sure what her reply would be, but she assented at once. A moment more and the boat was freed from her moorings, and the two were gliding pleasantly down the river.

"It is delicious on the water!" said May, gleefully. "It was so hot indoors I could not

find a cool corner to sit in, but here there is a delightful breeze. Isn't it nice!"

"It is more than nice—it is delightful!"

"But you will be tired," as she watched the busy splash of the oars. "I forgot it was hard work for you, Lord Carlyon."

"I should never be tired," he answered, eagerly. "I could row on for ever—just we two."

She answered nothing; child as she was, innocent as she might be of all pertaining to the passion love, there was a nameless something in his words, a seriousness in his voice, which she could not fail to notice. Her eyes drooped beneath the admiring gaze of those blue ones. She was not ready with any gay repartee; she could only sit silent, her ungloved hand playing idly with the waves, and so they drifted on.

"Promise me something," cried the Viscount, passionately, when the boat had turned, and the two were returning swiftly to Staines.

"Promise me something, Miss Graham!"

She answered nothing, and still her eyes would not meet his gaze—he persevered.

"At least, I may ask my boon—you will not be angry?"

"No."

"Then promise me that you will never forget this afternoon—that you will think sometimes of the pleasant hour we have had together—just our two selves alone together?"

They were very near together. Geoffrey lent forward, so that his breath almost fanned her cheek, as he waited for her answer. It came at last, one little word, tremblingly spoken, so tremulously that it only just reached his ear.

"Yes."

Geoffrey knew too well to imperil his cause by saying more. In perfect silence he fastened the boat to its moorings and handed May out; then he followed her to the house and took his leave—a simple, courteous farewell, such as he might have offered to a duchess without exciting the jealousy of the duke particularly interested in her grace. Almost before May knew he was going he was gone.

The girl threw herself upon the sofa and tried to think, but it was not easy to think with the memory of those blue eyes haunting her—with the tones of that musical voice ringing in her ears. What did he mean? Why did he look at her like that? Why should he ask her to remember him? He had only seen her twice; she could be nothing to him but a stranger, whom he might never meet again. At the last idea May broke down; she buried her head in the cushions and shed the bitterest tears she had ever known.

"I wish he had never come!" she sobbed; "I wish I had never seen him! I was so happy before, so quietly content, and now nothing can ever be quite the same again."

And the banker's heiress was right. Child as she had been, until that day she had grasped, in a few words, the meaning of the greatest change that can ever come in a woman's life—first love. Nothing can ever be the same again. It may not be the love of one life; it may not be the love that is to end in matrimony; it may bring us bitterest sorrow, sweetest joy; but whatever, whichever its effect, one thing is sure of every first love, happy or unfortunate—nothing can ever be the same again. We ourselves are changed; careless, unconscious childhood has gone for ever, and womanhood and realities have come!

May wore a coloured dress that night instead of the quaint, white costume which had so taken Lord Carlyon's fancy. Some subtle instinct told the girl her pale cheeks and heavy eyes would not bear the test of that heavy, white drapery.

For once in his life Sir John had to do without his daughter's greeting. She was dressing when he returned, and only emerged from her own room, an hour later, when the dinner-bell sounded.

"Tired, little one?"

"A little," returned the girl, wearily. "I believe I have given myself a headache."

"Wandering about in the heat! I wish you

would remember you have not a cast-iron constitution, May."

"I went on the water," returned May, bent on confession; "Lord Carlyon came to bring me those songs, and he proposed a row."

"Carlyon been? Why didn't you keep him to dinner?" asked Sir John.

"I never thought of it. He went directly we came off the water—half-past four, I think."

"And you knew I was coming at five; and he is the son of one of my oldest friends. Did you find him such a very tiresome companion, pet, that you couldn't bear with him half-an-hour longer?"

"I never thought of it," repeated May.

"And I have lost his card, so that I have no idea of his address. He didn't mention it, I suppose?"

"Yes,"—wondering that she had heard and remembered—"he said he had chambers in Clarges-street, and that his mother lived in the country."

"Ah!—poor Lady Carlyon!"

"Why is she poor, papa?"

"She is perfectly crazy upon the subject of religion—wears a poke-bonnet and rough serge dress, and deems anything more ornamental wicked. She worried her husband into an early grave; and, if the trustees hadn't interfered, would have brought up her son to be a dissenting minister."

"He doesn't look like one!"

"No; they separated him completely from his mother. It was a pity, rather; she was a beautiful woman, and she can't be fifty yet."

May did not think it needful to say the viscount had favoured her with his mother's age and his own.

"Lord Carlyon seems very cheerful, in spite of his family history."

"Yes," he's a nice young fellow, don't you think so, May?"

But May busied herself with her peach, and kept silence. She did not feel sure of her own voice if she trusted it to speak just then.

Two or three days later Sir John met Geoffrey in town, and brought him home to dinner; and after that the young people often met. The viscount was always finding excuses for coming to Meadowview; there were songs and new books to bring to May; knotty points over which to consult Sir John. Two or three days in every week were sure to see Geoffrey at Staines.

And about that time Sir John's study, could it have told tales, might have declared that its master's spirits were much higher—that the mighty examination of papers almost ceased. And one evening he threw himself into his chair and almost sobbed with thankfulness. "We shall weather the storm yet. My May will be the heiress she has always thought herself. I believe Geoffrey would have taken her without a penny—Heaven bless him! But I'm glad my girl won't go to her husband a dowryless lassie for all that."

And then the crisis came. Sir John had wondered for days why the young fellow did not speak out. The servants had expected Miss Graham's engagement to be announced until they despaired of it. May herself had tortured herself with many a doubt before Lord Carlyon asked for the heart he had been wooing so steadily in the summer sunshine.

It was a September afternoon, and he had come over unexpectedly, as he so often did, and strolling through the grounds with May, he had suggested they should go upon the water. She agreed; in those days she agreed to all he proposed. It was just such another day as that on which they had made their first excursion. Suddenly, as they were returning, Lord Carlyon bent forwards towards his companion,—

"Do you remember a promise you made me here?"

There was no evading the question in his eyes.

"Yes," she faltered.

"Darling, I want you to make me another.

May, will you promise to go through life at my side as my loved and honoured wife?"

She hesitated—she was so happy.

"May!" he repeated.

"Are you sure you love me?"

"Am I sure I am alive? Darling, surely you cannot doubt my affection—my word!"

"No," she said, gently; "only it is all so new—so strange."

"Strange that I should love you!"

"Will you love me always?"

"Until my life's end."

The little hand glided into his; Geoffrey knew he had won his wish. A moment more and they landed, and stood together in the secluded grounds of Meadowview.

"You are sure you will not change?" she pleaded. "I do not think I could bear that!"

"I am sure I love you more than all the world, you doubting child!" and then, before she knew what he was about, he had taken her in his arms, and was pressing passionate kisses upon her lips.

She trembled in that close embrace. He was her free choice, her first love, and yet no sense of security or protection seemed to have come to her. She yielded implicitly to his will; she nestled in his arms and let him kiss her and call her his own, his darling, but for all that no confidence came to her. She felt like a frightened child; her old ease and dignity failed her. The self-possessed mistress of Meadowview had changed into a timid, shrinking girl.

"You will be the fairest Lady Carlyon my house has ever known," said Geoffrey, fondly. "My darling, you will not make me wait too long for my wife; think how lonely I am, and how much I love you."

"You have known me such a short time," she whispered, shyly.

"Long enough to know my own mind. Why, little one, I made up that the first evening I ever came to Meadowview."

"You loved me even then?"

"Even then!"

"Papa will be so surprised."

"I think not."

"Does he know?"

"Not what you have promised me, my sweet! But he must have guessed my wishes. He is not quite so blind to his daughter's charms as a certain little lady of my acquaintance—who, of course, must be nameless."

"Lord Carlyon!"

"I mean you," he said, laughing. "I am not going to answer any questions which begin like that. Don't you know my name, dear?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Then never let me hear Lord Carlyon from your lips. Well, May, I am waiting."

"What for?"

"You were going to say something."

"Geoffrey," and the word came in almost a whisper, "do you think your mother will like me?"

"She won't be able to help it!"

The clock struck six, dinner was at half-past. Sir John must have returned long ago. When they reached the house May sped away to her own room, leaving Geoffrey to enlighten her father. It proved no very difficult task. Sir John shook the young viscount warmly by the hand.

"If May wishes it, I can say nothing; only, remember, she has never known a sorrow. Promise me to make her happy."

"It shall be the object of my life," returned Lord Carlyon. And then he began to press for an early marriage. To his surprise Sir John offered no opposition; he even said he disapproved of long engagements. He told the viscount he had always meant to give his daughter a hundred thousand pounds on her wedding-day, and that whenever he died everything except the entailed property must come to her. Never surely had father-in-law elect shown himself more amiable! Geoffrey felt exultant; and when May came into the drawing-room, she noted with delight that there was no cloud on either of the faces she so dearly loved.

"Then all your vows of never leaving me are faithless, childie," said Sir John, fondly; "and it seems I am to give you away."

"If you please, papa!" said May, demurely.

"If I please!" and he half sighed; "there, Lord Carlyon, I trust you with my dearest treasure."

All this was settled in the first days of September; but, in spite of the entreaties of Lord Carlyon and the amiability of Sir John, it was found impossible for the marriage to take place before December. Of course the news had to be written to the baronet's only sister, Lady Merton, who had always (she said) filled a mother's place to May. This lady declared three months was the shortest possible time in which a house worthy of a viscountess could be prepared; and to enforce her verdict she started for Staines at once, when she reduced the three conspirators, as she called them, to passive obedience.

"I may as well stay until it is all over," she said to May; "it will be much less embarrassing for you. While you were not engaged it did not matter Lord Carlyon haunting the house, even though you had no chaperon; but now everything is quite different. Besides, London is very dreary at this time of year, and as I should have to come backwards and forwards perpetually about your *trousseau*, it will really be much less trouble to me to stay here."

Put in this manner May could hardly refuse to receive the self-invited guest; but there had never been much sympathy between her and her aunt, and she would certainly have preferred to spend the last days of her maiden life unfettered by Lady Merton's supervision.

To Sir John, however, the offer seemed a positive relief, and Lord Carlyon was far too much a man of the world not to see the fitness of the widow's presence. May found herself in the minority, so she hid her private misery, and did her best to make her aunt's visit agreeable. If it was trying to be called on at any hour of the day to act as a lay model on which could be displayed all the triumphs of the milliner's and dressmaker's art, at least the sacrifice was for her own benefit, and not for Lady Merton's, so she had no just cause for complaint.

Often through the sweet, lingering days of that autumn the girl found herself wishing vaguely for the young mother whose life had ended so soon after her own began; never had May felt her loss so keenly as now. Sir John, in his tenderness, had indeed filled the place of both parents; but at this crisis of her life, there was a want he could not supply, that Lady Merton could not understand; only then did May realize what it was to be motherless. It came on her then with a strange pang, how little—how very little she knew of her mother!

Sir John had never cared to speak much of his wife, and until now May had been well content to respect his silence; but now she longed with an unutterable yearning to know something of her mother, who, after barely one brief year of wedded happiness, had been borne to her grave in the family vault.

"Papa," she said, one day, when Lady Merton by chance allowed them one of those *lettres d'elles* which were becoming so rare and precious; "I want you to tell me something about my mother."

Sir John sighed.

"She was like you, my child—only more beautiful."

"You have never told me anything about her, papa—where you met her, or if you had known her long; you never speak of her."

"The subject is too painful, May; rest content with knowing that we loved each other tenderly, and we were engaged a shorter time even than you contemplate—less than a month!"

"And had she no relations, papa?"

"None were at her wedding."

"I thought she might have had some nieces, perhaps, and I wanted to know if they might be my bridesmaids? I have so few relations."

Papa, only fancy, you and Aunt Merton are the only two I have in the world!"

"You will have your husband," said Sir John, tenderly; "and May, my darling, we have been very happy together without relations."

"Very!" she answered.

And day by day the preparations advanced; the settlements were prepared for signature; the wonderful *trousseau* was almost complete. Lady Merton busied herself with writing a list of the wedding guests—most of them her own special friends—since neither bride nor groom seemed to have many with which to eke out the number.

"If I only had some cousin!" said May, dejectedly. "Fancy having six bridesmaids you have never seen!"

"I wish I had a daughter or two to oblige you," said Lady Merton, pleasantly.

"I wish mamma had left me some cousins; it seems so strange she had no relations."

Lady Merton stared at her. "No relations!"

"I understood papa so the other day."

"I daresay he's right; he ought to know best. But I thought your mother had a sister?"

"Do you remember, mamma, Aunt Merton?"

"I never saw her"—stiffly.

"Weren't you at the wedding?"

"No one was there—it was a runaway match."

May opened her eyes.

"You had better ask no questions," said her aunt, not unkindly. "Believe me, child, you would hear nothing but what must make you sorry."

And May turned away with a new load at her heart.

CHAPTER II.

NOVEMBER was nearly over, but the last days of the gloomy month lingered with a laggard step.

The eighth of December was to see May Graham Viscountess Carlyon; and barely a fortnight remained of her maiden life when Geoffrey went into Yorkshire on business, and with his departure a fixed sadness seemed to settle on Meadowview and its inhabitants.

Lady Merton scolded her niece, affectionately, for her extreme dejection at the separation from her lover.

Sir John watched his darling anxiously; he looked very grave and careworn in these December days.

"You are quite happy, May; your heart is really in this affair?"

"My whole heart is Geoffrey's—except what is yours," she answered sweetly. "Ours will be what the world laughs at—a match for love's sake only!"

"Heaven grant it!" said Sir John, solemnly.

"Really your father seems as infatuated with Lord Carlyon as you can be, May," said Lady Merton, a little impatiently, one day when, Sir John being detained at the bank, she and her niece dined alone in the cosy, brightly-lighted dining-room.

"Yes," said May; "papa is very fond of Geoffrey. I am glad of it; I never could have married anyone he did not like."

"Do you mean that?" curiously.

"Yes, I think so, aunt; papa and I have been just all the world to each other. Even with Geoffrey I could not live without papa's love!"

She had hardly finished speaking when a servant entered and addressed himself to Lady Merton.

"Mr. Ward is here, my lady, and begs to see you."

Mr. Ward was one of Sir John's most trusted clerks. May started up with a sudden cry.

"Something is the matter! Papa would never send Mr. Ward here if he were coming home himself in a hour or two!"

Before they could prevent her, before Lady Merton had well understood her fears, she was in the hall. There stood the old man whom she had known from her baby days, a great

sadness in his face; for the first time in her life he greeted her without a kindly smile.

"Papa!" almost gasped May, more alarmed than ever at the old clerk's silent despair.

"He is very ill, Miss May; your aunt—"

"You do not want her," cried the girl, wildly. "It is for me you have brought a message. Oh! tell me quickly what it is!"

Lady Merton was with them in time to hear the request.

"You had better tell her," she said, quietly; "she is too anxious to hear suspense. Has anything happened to my brother?"

And then, in as cautious a manner as he could, the old clerk broke to them that Sir John had been seized with sudden illness, and was then lying in his own room at the bank, whence the doctor declared it to be impossible to remove him.

"The master had bad news, I think," said the old clerk, sadly—"a telegram or something. Mr. Mortimer went in and found him senseless, holding it in his hand. He has only spoken once since; to ask for Miss May."

"I will go at once," said the girl; "no one in all the world shall keep me from him!"

No one tried. Lady Merton, with tender care, herself wrapped the girl in her rich, fur-lined cloak, and whispered words of comfort.

"I can think of nothing!" moaned the poor child. "Oh! aunt, do not stop me!" as Lady Merton tried to press a glass of wine on her. "Every moment seems an eternity until I am at his side."

So the old clerk led her down the steps and placed her in the cab waiting to take them to the station. With rare delicacy of feeling he uttered no word, made no attempt at sympathy all through that cold, winter's journey, only when they had left the train and were driving rapidly to Lombard-street, he said, gently,—

"Sir John may be much better, Miss May; the doctors said everything would depend upon the next few hours."

"When did you leave him?"

"At five; there was an unlucky delay. I had to wait at Waterloo for a train."

"It is ten now," she said, wistfully. "Do you think—"

He understood the unfinished sentence.

"I feel sure you will be in time."

In time! Only that morning she had parted from her father in health and strength; now she must be thankful she was "in time" to see him alive once more. What a cruel mockery it seemed!

A little knot of people were gathered in the outer room. She recognized Mr. Mortimer and one or two others, but she took no notice of them. Unfastening the silver clasps of her cloak, she let it fall disregarded to the ground. She tossed her hat on to a chair, and then she followed Mr. Ward into what had been Sir John's private room.

He was lying on the sofa, and, for an instant, his daughter forgot everything but him. Falling on her knees beside the couch she took his hand in hers. Little she recked that a strange gentleman was staring at her in unmitigated surprise. Little she remembered how out of place she must look there in her evening dress, the bracelets on her arms, the flowers yet in her soft, brown hair.

"Papa, oh! father, best beloved, speak to me! Papa, do not go away and leave your May alone in this bleak world; I cannot bear it!"

At sound of that loved voice the dying man opened his eyes. He half raised himself upon his pillow.

She bent over him and kissed him.

"It is I, May!"

"My child! my Marion's child! Forgive me, May. I never thought to bring you this sorrow!"

"Forgive you!" she cried, passionately. "What can I have to forgive? You have been the best and tenderest of fathers to me. You have made my days a dream of happiness."

He hardly seemed to hear her.

"It has come, May, what I so dreaded—

what I would have given my whole life to save you from!"

"Nothing matters, dear, so that I have you." He sighed.

"You have been used to luxury, and now we are penniless. Oh! May, how will you bear it?"

"Money is not everything," answered the girl, believing him delirious, yet humouring his fancy. "Besides, I shall have you—and Geoffrey."

"Ah! he will protect you, and he will marry you for love's sake only. You will be safe, and I can meet your mother!"

His head fell back; a deep silence followed, only May did not understand its meaning. At last she felt a hand laid upon her shoulder.

"You must come away now."

The speaker was a man about thirty-five years of age—a grave, earnest face, with strongly-marked features, large, thoughtful grey eyes, and dark hair not free from silver threads.

"You must come away now."

"I cannot!" said May, angrily. "I must stay with him; he may wake and want me."

"He will not want you."

"I am all he has; let me stay with him."

The hand kept its hold upon her arm; there was a ring of deep pity in his voice.

"Heaven help you, Miss Graham! don't you understand me? Sir John can never want you again; he is beyond the need of all human love!"

She did not weep; she uttered no moan; her eyes were dry and tearless—they glittered with a strange unnatural sparkle as she uttered the one word,—

"Dead!"

Keith Foster did not misunderstand her; he knew, in spite of her awful calm, she was suffering keenly. Very gently he raised her from the ground and led her into the next room. It was quite empty now.

As soon as the news of Sir John's death had gone forth the watchers there had departed.

Keith placed May in a large easy chair, mixed a glass of brandy-and-water and brought it to her.

"Drink this."

"I cannot."

"You must!" he said, firmly; "for his sake, you must keep up your strength."

"He does not need me now; you said so."

"But you would not like to cross his wishes; you know what they would have been."

She drained the glass and put it on the table.

"That is better. Now who shall I send for to be with you? you cannot stay here alone."

"No one."

"Mrs. Mortimer?"

For the Mortimers lived at Kensington—no impossible distance it seemed to Keith Foster. May shuddered.

"I had rather be alone."

"Then you must let me take you home."

She made no reply. He took up a "Bradshaw."

"We shall just catch the last train for Staines. Perhaps, after all, it is better you should be at home with your own friends."

At last she forced her trembling lips to do her will.

"What was it?" she gasped. "What killed him?—he left me this morning well and strong, and now—"

"It was the heart."

"And is it true that he had bad news?"

He hesitated; but she must hear it soon; better perhaps that he should break it to her.

"I believe it has been a time of great anxiety at the bank. Mr. Mortimer has been for hours examining papers and things; he told me just now that they must suspend payment to-morrow."

"Then the failure and disgrace have killed my father!"

"The failure, perhaps—not the disgrace, for none could attach to Sir John. I have known him for ten years, and I should never have linked his name with such a word."

He wrapped her in her cloak, and led her down the stairs; but through all her agony of suppressed grief May felt one thing keenly—all his kindness, all his courtesy, were shown for her father's sake. There was something even in his manner, kind though it was, which showed this; in truth, Keith Foster was judging May somewhat harshly; he had attended Sir John for years.

Again and again he had urged on him to retire from business cares and anxieties, and had always been met with the answer,—

"He must go on a few years longer for his daughter's sake!"

And now, when he lay dying, his one wish to see this daughter, she only arrived after long delay (he never thought of how Mr. Ward had been detained waiting for trains) in an attire more suited for a ball than a sick-room.

Keith had his own ideal of womanhood—gentle, soothing, harmonious. Certainly May, with her impulsive ways, her quick, impetuous utterances fell far short of it.

He took every care for her comfort, and by means of a silver key secured a private compartment; but he was certainly not prepared to see May's brown eyes close, and to find, by her calm, regular breathing, she had fallen asleep five minutes after the train left Waterloo. "Heartless creature!" he muttered.

Poor child! she was not heartless, only so utterly worn out with grief and excitement that she was completely prostrate.

He watched her closely as he sat opposite, and then drew the curtains carefully to screen her from the draught.

What a child she looked as she leant back—her face flushed, her hair a trifle in disorder. Wonderfully beautiful, he admitted, even to himself; he quite understood Lord Carlyon's infatuation.

"Of course he will be true to her," thought Keith, musingly; "men don't give up a girl with such a face as that for any loss of fortune. They may postpone the wedding for three months, but next spring will see her Lady Carlyon."

He took her up in his arms as if she had been a baby when they reached Staines, and placed her on a seat while he went to procure a cab.

Coming back he saw that she still slept on as tranquilly as though she had been in her own bed at home.

"Poor child!" with a sudden softening of his heart towards her; "what will her awakening be like?"

After all he was destined to see; for when they reached Meadowview, and he had carried her to the drawing-room, as he sat talking to Lady Merton—who had hospitably ordered a bed to be prepared for him—with one sudden start she opened her eyes, and sat upright on the sofa.

She saw her aunt, but when Lady Merton would have approached with affectionate sympathy she put out both hands as though to ward her off, and turned to Dr. Foster, with the same question in eye and word.

"Is it quite true?"

He bowed his head.

She rose then and almost staggered towards the door.

"I had rather be alone," she said, in a dull, listless tone, as her aunt rose to follow her.

"May is an extraordinary girl," said Lady Merton, apologetically, as the door closed on her; "and my poor brother spoils her terribly. You must make allowances for her, Dr. Foster, if she seems heartless and unfeeling."

To his own surprise he found himself defending May.

"I am sure she is neither," he said, promptly.

"There are some natures whom grief drives to take refuge within themselves. When Lord Carlyon returns I doubt not Miss Graham's mood will change."

"I wish they had been married!" sighed Lady Merton; "there is nothing so unlucky as a postponed wedding."

Keith Foster was glad to get away from the loquacious widow. A servant ushered him to a

sumptuously-furnished bedroom, and inquired at what hour he would like to breakfast in the morning.

"Eight," returned Keith, thinking of his patients, and forgetting that early rising was probably not among the habits of the late baronet's household.

But early though it was someone was there before him. When he entered the breakfast-room a slight, black-robed figure was there to meet him.

Pale almost as marble, her cheeks wan, her eyes heavy and with dark rings beneath them, May took her place at the head of the table and asked Dr. Foster, in a voice which tried not to tremble, if he preferred tea or coffee.

"You should not have done this," said Keith, gently; "the effort will be too much for you."

"It is nothing. I have to see Mr. Mortimer at nine; he has just sent a message that he will be here then to go into business matters."

"Business matters with you so soon!"

"There is no one else," she said, wearily; "and delay would not make it easier."

"But he ought not to press things on you with such haste!"

She shuddered.

"I shall manage to go through with it, somehow."

"And he is an old friend, perhaps?"

"I have known him all my life; but he is not a friend. I have no friends, Dr. Foster."

"No friends!"

"I went out very little, and the people who came to dine with us were not exactly friends, you see. While we had each other we wanted no one else."

"Will you allow me to telegraph for Lord Carlyon?"

"He is in York-hire, but I hardly know where. He is travelling from place to place; I expect him home to-morrow."

"Can I do anything for you?" he urged, impelled to make the offer by pity for the dead father, whose darling she had been. "I don't think, as matters stand, you ought to see Mr. Mortimer alone, unless you have implicit confidence in him."

She hesitated.

"I have always heard a doctor's time was so valuable!"

"A few hours will make no difference. I am fortunate in having an able assistant."

So he stayed.

"Feel that I am!" he thought, as he followed May to the library. "Here I am, sacrificing patients, money, and time to a girl I never saw till yesterday, whom I probably shall never see again—a girl whom a few months will make a peeress, and who will then probably out me if she meets me in the street. She is just the opposite to all my notions of a true woman's attributes, and yet her face haunts me; yet I feel myself wishing all kinds of foolish absurdities and cherishing a cordial antipathy to Lord Carlyon."

But an hour later he was glad he had stayed. All the purse-pride in Mr. Mortimer's nature came out at this interview. Of true gratitude, of real regard towards the benefactor who advanced him from a clerk to a partner, he had none, since his first words were to cast blame on Sir John for the want of foresight which had brought about their disasters. The bank must close at once. When everything has been wound up there would be just twenty shillings in the pound for the creditors.

"This place and Grahamsville can't be touched," he said, brusquely; "they go to the new heir, but every penny that can be separated from the estates will be needed for the creditors. Your portion, that we heard so much about, will be nil; Miss Graham—absolutely nil."

In these words the self-made man paid off the grudge he had always felt towards May for being more beautiful and attractive—aye! and ten times more refined—than his own daughters. He had never forgiven her for not inviting them on long visits to Mesdowview,

and receiving them as bosom friends. He thought he had his revenge now.

Keith's blood boiled.

"I presume the same fate awaits your own possessions?" he said, coldly; "the ruin of one partner necessarily involves that of the other."

"Well, it's bad enough for me, but not so black as that! Unlike our late friend, I am a prudent man, doctor. I have settled my house in Kensington on my wife, and a snug little income along with it. I see my way pretty clearly to a managership; and so, thanks to my caution, I shall lose very little by the folly—I won't call it by a harsher name—of my late partner."

May stood up with flashing eyes.

"At least spare his memory from insult!" she cried. "He never did you anything but good. Why should you speak against him now?"

"I shall choose my own manner of speaking," retorted Mr. Mortimer; "and certainly not alter it at the bidding of the penniless daughter of a bankrupt. You'll have to change your manners with your fortunes I reckon, Miss Graham."

"Be silent!" thundered Keith, almost beside himself with fury; "if you have no compassion for the orphan of him you called your friend at least respect the future Viscountess Carlyon!"

"That match will soon be off," said Mortimer, with a sneer; "everyone knows Carlyon only wanted her money to pay off the mortgages on his property. I should say the chance of being his viscountess would soon be in the market again, and Miss Graham were glad to keep herself by earning an honest penny. I believe Mrs. Mortimer is looking out for a nursery governess for our two youngest. Perhaps the post would suit my young lady if it isn't filled up; it's quite good enough for a linendraper's niece."

He could not speak another word. Keith took him by the shoulders and fairly turned him out of the room. Meeting a footman, he delivered the struggling banker to his charge.

"See this person off the premises!"

He tried to find Lady Merton, but heard she was still in her own room.

He went back to the library where May still sat, motionless, in the chair where he had left her.

"Miss Graham," began Keith, courteously; "you must not let the insolent taunts of a man like that trouble you for an instant. I doubt not that by to-morrow Lord Carlyon will be here himself to refute such calumnies."

"Do you think it is true?"

"I am sure it was false. I am a blunt man and little used to compliments, but I am quite certain any man you deigned to favour would woo you for love's sake only."

She shuddered.

"You heard what he said?"

Keith bowed.

"Is it true? Am I a linendraper's niece?"

He shook his head.

"You are your father's daughter; and to my mind, Miss Graham, that is a title of honour. And now I am going to leave you. I am quite sure you will soon have able aid than mine; yet let me assure you that if through any delay in Lord Carlyon's return you need someone to act for you, I can have no greater pleasure than to serve you."

To his surprise she took his hand and pressed her lips to it with almost a child's grace.

"Heaven bless you, Dr. Foster!" she said simply. "Good-bye!"

And all that day—aye, and through many that followed it, too—the memory of this kiss haunted the young physician, following him in his visits to patients, and never leaving him even in his hours of hard-won rest. He thought of May constantly, and from the bottom of his heart he hoped Lord Carlyon would prove himself worthy of her love. He who never looked at such things took to studying the personal news in the papers, and was rewarded, two days later, by seeing the announcement that Lord Carlyon had returned

from Yorkshire, and was staying at his chambers in Clarges-street.

"Thank Heaven!" said Keith, speaking aloud, unconsciously, in his earnestness; "then that poor child has someone to fight her battles."

CHAPTER III.

PENNILESS.

A HANDSOME house in Clapham, replete with every comfort; a pleasant breakfast-table with three persons sitting around it—father, mother, and daughter.

Charles Anderson called himself a tradesman; his name was over a large establishment in Oxford-street, and some fifty or sixty assistants received their salary from him. But he himself bore little trace of the shop—a handsome, kindly-looking gentleman, of middle age, with a cheerful face and a high, intellectual forehead; a good classical scholar, well-versed in art and science, possessing a strong taste for literature, and an innate refinement.

Had Sir John Graham ever cared to associate with his brother-in-law he would soon have forgotten what he considered the gulf in their social positions, but he had never so cared. Passionate love had made him bury his prejudices sufficiently to marry the linen-draper's sister, but he cut her off entirely from her kindred. Not even when she was dying would he summon them to her side; and when hearing of Lady Graham's early death Mrs. Anderson herself wrote to the baronet, begging to have the care of her little motherless niece, at least for the first few years, when social status could make no difference to her, the letter was never even answered.

Some women would have resented the slight. Mrs. Anderson only sorrowed over it; she had loved her pretty little sister-in-law very dearly, and would fain have ministered to her child. She herself was a clergyman's daughter, and she had married her husband because she cared for him, not for the comforts his prosperous position afforded her.

Fortune favoured the well-matched couple as years rolled on. Their daughter bid fair to be an heiress, and many circles as high as Sir John Graham's own would have welcomed the Andersons, had they cared to live in the whirl of constant society; as it was they did not care, but preferred their old life with its simple pleasures, and its old, tried friends.

"Something is the matter," said Mrs. Anderson, quietly. "Charles, you have hardly spoken this morning!"

"I have heard some bad news," and he touched a letter near his plate.

"What has happened?"

"Sir John Graham is dead—died suddenly last Monday. The bank has stopped payment, and when everyone is paid that poor child won't have a penny in the world after being brought up to think herself an heiress!"

His wife and daughter listened in consternation. They had believed Sir John almost a millionaire; they could hardly realize the news.

"It will postpone May's marriage," said Mrs. Anderson, at last. "Poor child! how lonely she must be."

The Andersons had received no official intimation of the grand match their young relative was to form; but it is common with the general public, they had seen the announcement of Lord Carlyon's engagement in the society papers.

"How did you hear?" asked Marion. "Surely May never wrote to you herself, papa?"

"I don't suppose May even knows of our existence, dear. The letter is from her aunt, Lady Merton; and I have not told you the worst—the engagement is broken off entirely."

"Broken off!" echoed his daughter, in disbelief.

"Lord Carlyon declares he is perfectly unable to keep a portionless wife. I should like to have the handling of him—deserting a girl whose only parent is barely cold in his grave."

"And what is May going to do?" cried Marion. "Oh! mamma, I wish she might come here."

Mr. Anderson looked at his wife.

"Lady Merton seems to me to care very little what becomes of her niece so that she has not to support her herself. She tells me expressly, three times over, her income is only sufficient for her own necessities; and then adds she writes to me, unknown to May, to inquire if I am willing to do anything towards the support of my only sister's child."

A long silence followed. Marion hardly liked to urge her request again; at twenty-two she understood quite well the reasons which had made her cousin a stranger to them. To have a young lady living in their house who looked down on them as being of another sphere would hardly be pleasant.

"I don't like the letter," said Mrs. Anderson, as she returned it to her husband. "I fancy Lady Merton would give May to understand she provided her for a home, and at the same time like you to pay for it. I think the only thing is for us to propose for the poor girl to come and live with us. After all, Marion's child cannot be entirely unlovable."

The offer was made so promptly that the very next day Lady Merton communicated it to her niece, and if she entirely misrepresented the spirit of Mr. Anderson's letter, it must be said in excuse that he had defeated her wishes.

She had been at the pains to ascertain that he was an extremely rich man, with only one child; and she had planned, if he offered to allow May two or three hundred a year (which she heard he was well able to do) quietly to pocket the money as a pleasant addition to her own income, and in return, therefore, to allow her niece to share her home, and bestow upon her a very modest sum for dress and pocket-money.

My lady had arranged it all beautifully. She was going to win May's eternal gratitude at Mr. Anderson's expense.

She never denied that she had written to him.

"He has scraped together a little money, and, I daresay, for a linendraper, he is fairly well off," May shuddered.

"I wish you had not written to him; I would rather starve than take his money."

"You can't starve, and he gives you no chance of taking his money. All your very generous kinsman offers you is a share of his home. I daresay they'll put you in the attic."

"I shall refuse; something will turn up—some way of earning my own livelihood."

"And till it does?"

"You will let me stay with you."

"I am delighted to refuse you, dear; but I am due at Lady Masterton's next week, and from her house I start on a long round of visits."

May understood; she said nothing, it was a case where words would have been thrown away. "I wonder if Sir Cecil would let me stay here!"

"May!" and it ever pious indignation sounded in a woman's voice it sounded in my lady's then.

"If he stays abroad he must have a house-keeper; and who could take such care of the dear old place as I?"

"You must be mad; it would be like asking him to marry you. You are positively indecent, May!"

May rose with a sigh. Only a week ago she had had an adoring father and a devoted lover. Next Thursday was to have seen her an English peeress; and now she stood utterly alone, doubtful how to procure a shelter and food to prolong the life she had ceased to value.

"Shall I write and tell the linendraper you accept his generous proposal?"

"I will tell you when I come back, I am going to London."

"Indeed!"

"I am going to consult a friend. Don't look at me like that, Aunt Merton; it is the truth."

Two hours later, a slight, girlish figure, dressed in the deepest mourning, stood before the door of the apartments where Keith Foster received his patients. It was nearly three o'clock; the young physician's visiting hours were over, and the page made a little difficulty about admitting May. He was still remonstrating that his master was just going out when Keith himself appeared. His heart throbbed as he recognized his visitor. He said nothing to the page—no reproof or scolding; but he took May's hand, and led her gently through the outer rooms to his own private one. He gave her an easy-chair, poked the fire into a cheerful blaze, and then began, in a voice he strove to make careless,—

"Why did you not send for me? I would have come directly. This is too long a journey for you to take alone."

What had become of his philosophy, his attachment to his ideal woman! All had vanished at sight of May's face.

"I could not trouble you to do that; indeed, I ought not to take up your time now. I have no right; but you said once you would help me."

"I would help you with heart and will," he answered. "As to right, you have the strongest right in the world to any aid I can give you, since I begged you to ask for it."

They sat on in silence; she hardly knew how to begin, he could not find words.

"I hope you have not come to me professionally," he said, at last. "Forgive me, Miss Graham, but you are looking very far from well."

"I am perfectly well," she said, in a weary, sorrow-laden voice. "Sometimes I wish I wasn't; but the grief that has robbed my life of happiness seems powerless to impair my health."

"And you will be glad some day that it was so. Now, tell me, how can I help you?"

"Do you remember that morning at Staines?"

"Perfectly."

"And Mr. Mortimer's visit?—his cruel sneers?"

"Yes."

"Dr. Foster, they have all come true. I, who a few days ago thought myself an heiress, have come here to-day to ask you to tell me how I can earn my own living."

She had taken off her gloves, and stretched her hands over the ruddy flames to warm them. He saw then that the diamond engagement ring was missing. He understood it all; and even in the midst of his pity for her he could not help one selfish throb of joy—at least she was free.

"I will help you, as gladly—as freely as if you were my sister; only I am full of indignation. How could anyone in his senses—"

"Hush!" said May, gently; "abusing him won't alter things. It is better so than if he had married me and the rain came afterwards. Think what my life would have been then!"

"And you will not make your home with Lady Merton?"

"I cannot. The only refuge offered me is at Clapham with my uncle the linendraper."

What it cost her pride to utter these words no tongue can tell, but Keith understood the effort. He said, gravely,—

"I have known one linendraper whom I should consider it an honour to count kindred with; let us hope your uncle resembles him. Miss Graham, you asked me for advice. Why not go to him and make the trial; you may be happier than you expect."

"I should never be happy living on a tradesman's charity. I would a hundred times rather work, even if I sewed my fingers to the bone!"

"You are so young," he said, wistfully; "so young and gentle; you are not fit to struggle with this rough, cold world, Miss Graham."

"But if I must?"

"I would still urge you to try Clapham; at least, for a time—only a little time."

"But the difficulty would be the same. I can't go on living a pensioner on my uncle's charity. Why, I might live to be sixty!"

"Yes."

"And"—with flaming cheeks,— "he might grow to grudge me my expenses; he might want me to serve in his shop!"

Keith looked into the fire. Was there the ghost of a chance for him. Should he risk all, and tell her of his wishes.

"There is something I should like to suggest," he began, nervously—he who had never known what hesitation meant; "only I am afraid you would be angry; you might be vexed."

"Anything would be better than Clapham," said May, graciously. "Perhaps,"—as a bright thought struck her—"perhaps you have some children, and want a governess for them. I never taught anyone in my life, you know; but I would do my very best if only your wife would try me."

She turned to him with bright, eager face—Keith Foster caught her hand in his.

"May, I know the risk I run, the danger I encounter of losing your friendship, but I will have it all. Will you be my wife?"

"Your wife?" she cried.

"I have loved you since our first meeting. I know I am not worthy of you; but, indeed, my darling, I could make you happy; I am sure of it if only you would let me try. I am not a poor man; I can provide an easy home for my wife; and if love can guard you from it you shall never know a sorrow."

She stood still, motionless, with a sad look in her beautiful brown eyes: she was not angry, not indignant, only unutterably pained.

"I am very sorry," and she released her hand; "I am sure you mean generously, but it cannot be!"

"Cannot! Oh! May."

"Cannot. What opinion would you have of me, if I could accept your name just to free myself from my difficulties? You know that a week ago I was engaged to another man, that but for a freak of fortune I should be his wife. How can you think I would listen to another too?"

"Forgive me!" he pleaded; "forgive me!"

"I have nothing to forgive; you have been all kindness, all generosity, only you have robbed me of the only friend I had."

"And do you think I can cease to be your friend because you have denied my presumptuous wishes? You must have a poor opinion of me."

"I think you are the noblest man I ever met," she said, raising her big brown eyes to meet his, in fearless trust; "only I cannot take such a sacrifice, I dare not. You would find I am not all you think—I am nothing but a weary, heart-broken girl, and you would weary of your generosity in a month."

"Never!"

"I think so. Well, I shall go to Clapham. I do not know why, but you seem to put my uncle's conduct in quite a different light to Lady Merton. Dr. Foster, will you let me thank you for all. And if we never meet again, don't think so hardly of me."

"I am sure we shall meet again some day," he answered, with a smile of peculiar brightness; "and I could never think hardly of you under any circumstances. Remember, if ever you want a friend, send for me; I shall build no hopes on such a simple act. I will not trouble you with my folly again."

And those words rang sadly in her ears as she returned to Staines. It might be folly. Of course, she could not take advantage of his momentary infatuation. Her heart had been given, she thought, to Geoffrey Carlyon; he had proved himself false and now it was her own again. She had no regrets for Geoffrey; from the moment she knew his treachery her love for him died. Strange as it may seem, when she had formally signified to Lady Merton her acceptance of the linendraper's proposal and retired to her own room, her tears—and very bitter ones they were—were not for Viscount Carlyon, nor for her lost father, or ruined prospects, but for the man

who had promised never again to trouble her with his folly—the man who had wooed her for love only.

CHAPTER IV.

WEDDED.

"I HAVE said you would be at Clapham to-morrow afternoon," observed Lady Merton to her niece. "I hope, May, things will turn out better than you expect."

"They can't turn out worse," answered her niece, with a kind of hopeless sadness, which touched her ladyship, worldly-minded woman though she was.

"After all, the linendraper may have made money, and those kind of people generally adore rank; they may be tolerably generous to you for the sake of entertaining a baronet's child."

May shook her head.

"Well, write to me sometimes, child. I wish I could have kept you with me. After all it would only have been for a little while; with your face you are not likely to remain May Graham long."

The maid packed her young lady's possessions, and wept bitterly when she heard she was not to accompany her to Clapham. May soothed her kindly—she was touched at the girl's affection.

"You'll let me come and see you sometimes, miss?" pleaded the faithful Mary; "mother lives at Kennington, and it ain't no way from there to Clapham."

"I will send you my address," said May, only then recalled to the fact that she had never even heard the name of her uncle's house.

"Make a good luncheon, my dear," said her aunt, affectionately, the next day; "I expect they dine early at Clapham, and there will be nothing more extensive waiting for you than family tea."

"You told them I was coming to-day?"

"Yes; I said Thursday afternoon."

Miss Graham reached Waterloo at about four o'clock, and drove off with her possessions in a cab. It never occurred to her that either Clapham Junction or Vauxhall station would have been nearer her destination. She gave the driver the address with a shiver of apprehension lest it should turn out, after all, that her uncle resided over his shop. "Richmond House, Clapham Common," sounded sweet, but she was quite prepared to find it an emporium of cheap and second-rate drapery.

"A long drive—a very long drive it seemed to May—and then, in the gathering darkness, the cab stopped before a large, detached house standing in a pleasant garden. The man pushed open the gate, and drove on to the door.

"It can't be here!" said May, nervously; "there must be some mistake."

"This is Richmond House, miss."

"Then they are rich and stuck up," decided May. "It will be worse even than the shop. How they will despise my poverty!"

A page opened the door, and a neat maid-servant came forward to receive the young lady.

"My mistress and Miss Marion have gone to meet you, miss; they started two hours ago."

May was pleased, in spite of herself, at this mark of attention, and continued to express her regret.

"Will you go to your own room, miss?" asked the servant, respectfully; "or shall I show you the way to the drawing-room?"

May elected to go to her own room, wondering if it would prove the attic she had expected; but when she followed the maid upstairs she found that the house seemed built entirely on two floors, for there seemed no means of ascending higher.

At the end of the landing her guide opened a door and disclosed a very pretty bedroom, where a bright fire burnt cheerfully; communicating with it was another room fitted up as a little study. Martha lighted the gas, and May had time to see that the furniture was good, and in excellent taste.

"I will have your luggage brought up at once, miss. Shall I send anyone to help you unpack?"

May declined. A penniless dependent must not give too much trouble, she decided. It was a pleasant task to take out her own possessions and scatter them about. It might have sad recollections, but it gave the room a homelike air.

She was in the thick of it when a knock sounded at the door.

"Come in!" she cried, quickly.

There entered a girl three or four years her senior, with a fair, thoughtful face. She was dressed in a warm, dark-coloured cashmere trimmed with velvet, and May's first idea was, that if her attire came from "the shop," that establishment must be far superior to her imagined idea.

The girl advanced with outstretched hand, but, to May's amazement, her cousin seemed far the more nervous of the two.

"I am so sorry we were out," began Marion, gently; "it must have seemed so unkind, but we went to meet you. We made sure you would come to Vauxhall."

"It was very kind of you," said May, mechanically.

Marion felt chilled.

"Will you come and see mamma? she is waiting tea for us."

May followed her in perfect silence downstairs to the drawing-room. Here, on a dainty-looking tea-table, stood a tray of silver and china, and a sweet-faced woman, with eyes like Marion's, sat before it. She rose as the girls entered.

"My dear!" she said to May, giving her the kiss Marion had been too shy to offer; "I am very glad to see you. I know it must be hard for you to come among strangers, but we will do all we can to make you feel at home."

"Thank you."

But her voice had a different ring now; she took the seat they offered her, and Mrs. Anderson at least could see that the brown eyes were full of tears.

"Did you leave Lady Merton well?" she asked, more for the sake of conversation than from interest.

"Perfectly, thank you."

"It must have been a great grief for her to part from you."

"I think not," with a strange smile. "I think Aunt Merton was only afraid of having to keep me."

Mrs. Anderson could have cried at the bitterness of the voice.

"You must let us know your tastes, May," she said, kindly. "It is hard for you to come to strangers at such a time of trouble, but I hope we shall not seem strangers to you long."

"I wonder you don't hate me!" exclaimed May.

"Hate you!" repeated Marion, in amazement. "Why?"

"I was kept aloof from you all my life; I only come now I am in trouble, like a pauper, to be a dependent on your charity!"

The girl was struggling with her tears. Marion's own eyes were not dry; she understood all the proud, sensitive nature must be suffering.

"Don't think of that, dear!" returned Mrs. Anderson; "it may have hurt us both a little that our sister's only child was a stranger to us. But, believe me, we are both glad to have you here now, and we look on you as a second daughter."

And that evening was only an earnest of the future. When May had seen her uncle her fears were set at rest. Life at Clapham might be different from her lonely day-dreams at Staines, but at least it was a refined and intellectual family among whom she found herself. At least she received from one and all a tender consideration which could not have been increased had she been the heiress she once believed herself. And as the first weeks of the new year wore on she grew to feel as if she were at home, grew to love the Andersons as

she had never been able to love her aunt, Lady Merton.

"Keep the — Review from May," said Mr. Anderson one evening to his wife and daughter, as they sat waiting for their guest; a strange thrill of compassion in his voice.

"What is it, papa?"

"Lord Carlyon's marriage."

"Married!" gasped Marion. "Why, it is not three months ago since he was engaged to May!"

"He has married the eldest Miss Mortimer. There must have been strange treachery somewhere, for poor Graham to die penniless and his partner to remain a rich man."

"May never mentions the Mortimers."

"Nor Lord Carlyon," put in Marion. "Papa, don't you wonder he could have deserted her; she is so sweet and beautiful?"

"I think she will live yet to be thankful for the poverty which saved her from being the victim of a mercenary marriage."

"Who talks of marriage?" cried May, coming in, looking wonderfully attractive in her evening dress of silk and crape. "Oh! there is the — Review, and I can see the victims for myself!"

It was too late to prevent her; she had taken up the paper. What she felt they never knew, only when she laid it down; they saw that her face was very grave and pale. All through that evening she lacked her usual animation; she was more like the silent May who had come among them first.

"An old friend of mine is coming to dinner to-morrow," announced Mr. Anderson. "Guess who it is? Marion will be delighted."

A strange light came into his daughter's face.

"Dr. Foster?"

"Right, May!" turning to his niece. "I know you do not care for general society yet, but you will not mind meeting an old friend of mine."

"No."

And all the while she was wondering if he were Marion's lover, and how she could bear to see him at her cousin's side. She knew the truth now; her heart had been caught in the rebound. She might have given her girlhood's preference, her first love, to Geoffrey Carlyon but her life's devotion, her heart's best passion was Keith's.

She remembered now his remark respecting linendrapers. Of course, Mr. Anderson was the one exception he named. Well, if he had forgotten her she would show him she could forget too; and so, cold and beautiful as an ice queen, our little wayward heroine went downstairs to meet the man who had once offered to marry her for love only.

He never alluded to their former meeting; only, when Mrs. Anderson introduced them he bowed low over her hand, and whispered, "I little thought to find you here." He hardly spoke to her again. He had a great deal to say to Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, and once or twice May caught Marion's eyes fixed on him almost beseechingly. One thing was evident—Miss Anderson had no common interest in the handsome doctor.

After that he came again and again, until they grew to look for him two or three times a week. No engagement was announced, but May felt persuaded he came there for Marion's sake. Well, what right had she to complain if the man she had rejected sought consolation elsewhere? and who could make him happier than her gentle cousin?

But May was no heroine of romance—only a wilful girl, with a loving, sensitive heart, and a warm, impetuous nature. Resolved to show Dr. Foster she could forget as entirely as he, she began to treat him with the most frigid courtesy, the most ceremonious formality. She never spoke to him if she could help it; at going and coming she accorded him only a distant bow.

"Have I offended you, Miss Graham?" he asked, one night, when by an accident he found himself alone with her.

"How could you offend me?" she returned, coolly.

She was thinking that the last time they had been alone together he had offered her his love. He was wondering what had changed her so since that bright December morning. "You seem to object to my presence here," he said, gravely. "To grudge me even the welcome I receive from others, and in which you will not join!"

"It does not matter to me."

"Nothing matters to you in which I am concerned. You need not trouble yourself to show it me so often. I quite understand."

"It doesn't matter to you?"

He would not contradict her.

"You don't come here to see me; you come to see my uncle and aunt—and Marion."

"Mr. and Mrs. Anderson have been my friends from my earliest childhood."

"And Marion is something more than a friend!"

"And Marion, of course, is more than a friend," he agreed.

To his astonishment, May flung down her work and rushed out of the room.

"What can it mean?" he asked himself. "Is her heart so sore for that villain's perfidy she can't bear to hear engagements or love affairs spoken of even yet? Well, Marion's wedding will be a hard trial to her, poor child! Yet she must hear of it soon, for Henry is on his way home, and the affair must come off in May or June!"

That same evening May came into her cousin's room. That was no uncommon occurrence. The two often sat up discussing little matters.

"Marion," began May, timidly; "why did you never tell me of your engagement?"

Marion put one arm round her.

"It was only quite settled just after you came to us; and mamma and I both thought it kinder not to mention it. We feared it might remind you of—the past."

"But he did not come here directly after I did!"

"He could not come; he wrote. It was a very odd affair"—blushing—"begun when we were both children. My papa and mamma were so against it on account of his profession, and so we waited and waited until, seeing my whole heart was in it they gave way, like the indulgent darlings they are."

"And you are happy?"

"I am perfectly happy. My dear, it seems selfish to talk of my happiness to you."

May sighed.

"Who told you, dear?"

"Who told me what?"

"About us. Was it mamma?"

"Oh, no! It was—Dr. Foster."

"Keith. You must learn to call him by his name, May. Why, he will be a sort of cousin of yours!"

May felt as if she could dispense with the relationship. She wondered what Marion would say could she know of that *à-tête* in the doctor's consulting-room—not yet six months' old; but she was a loyal, generous girl, and she resolved her cousin should never hear of Keith's temporary breach of faith.

"It was only a momentary madness, even of pity, for my loneliness," she thought. "Marion is his real choice. I was but a passing fancy. Well, I daresay they will be very happy; but I would give worlds if some lucky chance would take me away until after this wedding."

And the lucky chance actually came. To her intense surprise the morning's post brought May a letter from Lady Merton, containing a very warm invitation to her niece to spend the spring and summer with her, and enter such society, under her auspices, as her recent mourning permitted.

May placed the letter in Mrs. Anderson's hands as soon as she could get her comfortably to herself.

"What shall I do?"

Mrs. Anderson sighed, but she was not selfish.

"I think you ought to go, May. Such society

as Lady Merton offers you is your birthright. We shall miss you bitterly—more bitterly than ever when Marion leaves us—but I think you ought to go," kissing her.

"It is just that," said May, impelled to confidence by that motherly caress, and knowing her regrets would be ascribed to Lord Carlyon, and not to Keith Foster. "Marion is to be married soon; she told me so, and I do not think I could bear to be at a wedding—not just yet."

"It is only natural, dear. But you are very young; I trusted time might have effaced Lord Carlyon's image from your heart."

"I shall get over my trouble in time," said May, resolutely; "only I could not bear to be at a wedding, or see a *trousseau* just yet; and so, as Aunt Merton has asked me, I think I had better go. Only you and Uncle Charles won't think me ungrateful; I could not bear that."

"And you will come back?" said Mrs. Anderson, a little wistfully. "But I fear not, May; with your face you are not likely to be allowed to be our sunshine long."

"I will come back when the wedding is over," said May, blithely. "And now I must write to Aunt Merton."

Little did May even guess at what had prompted this invitation. Sir Cecil Graham had but recently returned to Europe; the first news that met him was of his cousin's losses and his daughter's sorrows.

Young, chivalrous, and energetic, the baronet's first step was to seek out Lady Merton, and insist that she and her orphan nieces should occupy Meadowview—at least, for the present.

In the meantime he placed the late Sir John's affairs in the hands of an able solicitor, who stated there was not the least doubt that Mr. Mortimer had defrauded his partner's child, and that, when legal proceedings were taken, he would be only too thankful to disgorge his ill-gotten gains to save himself the disgrace of a criminal prosecution.

But having set all this on foot, Sir Cecil became possessed with a strong desire to see his young cousin. Even without the Graham estates he was a man of large wealth. And brilliant dreams of what might ensue from the meeting haunted the dowager and made her send that invitation to Clapham.

A day or two in town and then Lady Merton confided her plans to May—that delightful Sir Cecil had placed Meadowview at their disposal—had positively begged her to go to it. May acquiesced languidly. A summer at her old home must be dear to her under any circumstances. And so the middle of April found them located at Staines.

Everything was as she had left it. Sir Cecil had made no alterations; the same servants waited on her, and with all their old respect. May felt as if life had gone back a year, but for her father's loss. But for the consciousness of that wedding soon to be she would have been happy.

She received very few letters from Clapham, and these contained hardly any allusion to the marriage. May little guessed the loving zeal, the careful anxiety with which her aunt and Marion avoided all reference to what so engrossed their thoughts.

And then, when she had been at Meadowview three weeks—when she felt almost as if she had never left the sweet, sweet home—one afternoon, when her aunt was out, the servant announced Sir Cecil Graham. With a strange hesitation she received the last representative of her house—a tall, erect, soldierly-looking man—so young that his smile had almost a boyish gaiety—so frank and cordial that his manner set her at ease directly.

"I wanted to see you very much," he began, after they had shaken hands. "I wish from my heart I had been in England in November."

"You could not have saved papa!"

"I might have lightened his anxieties; at least, I could have taken care of you. It seems, May (you'll let me call you that, as we're cousins), Mortimer had been robbing him right and left for years. The money on which

the scoundrel lives—what he has settled on his wife—is all your father's."

"I have managed without it," said May, a little wearily. "People have been very good to me."

He smiled. "I can believe that. But, May, as your nearest relation on your father's side, as the head of the family, I cannot see you wronged."

"You would never speak to Mr. Mortimer!"

"Speak to him!" laughed Sir Cecil. "He wouldn't care for that. I have sent my lawyer to him and given him his choice—a public investigation and a criminal prosecution or restitution."

"How could he restore the money if he had settled it on his wife. Besides, his daughter—"

"Yes," interrupted the young baronet; "I know money is not all of which that family have robbed you. I cannot undo that, but the money they must refund. No settlement on a wife—no portion to a daughter—could stand if the settlement or portion has to be paid with stolen money. And so, May, you will be somewhat of an heiress after all. We have got back some ninety thousand pounds of your poor father's capital, and it is safely invested in my name as your guardian and trustee."

May took the news of her wealth very easily.

"You are a very young guardian!"

"I am twenty-four! I mean to take good care of you, Miss May, I can assure you."

"Thank you."

"And now you must make up your mind where you would like to live. Shall I lend you Meadowview for a few years? It seems a great deal more yours than mine."

She shook her head.

"You are very, very good to me! It has made me very happy coming here, and I should like to stay until the summer is over."

"And then?"

"Then I will go back to Clapham."

In a few words she told him how she had been received there, and how generously kind they had been.

He listened attentively.

"Yes, it would be mean to leave them altogether now; but you ought to have a season in London every year. I daresay Lady Merton would arrange it."

In the month that followed, Sir Cecil and his cousin were thrown a great deal together, and, long before it was over, the baronet had made up his mind that he could not spare her to go back to Clapham, she must stay with him always as his much-loved wife. But when he told his tale, when he pleaded for a favourable answer, May buried her face in her hands, and sobbed aloud.

"Oh! Cecil, I am so sorry; I never thought of this."

"But you will think of it now?" he urged.

"You will not send me away hopeless, May?"

"I must!"

"In time," he pleaded; "when you have forgotten?"

"Listen," she whispered; "I am not thinking of Lord Carlyon; he was my girlish ideal, and when he shattered my esteem for him my love went too. When I was homeless, penniless, someone asked me to be his wife for mere love's sake. I was mad with pride and wilfulness, so I refused him. But, Cecil, for all that I loved him, and I shall go down to my grave loving him still."

"You shall never regret your confidence, May," he answered, gravely; "and, dear, if you ever think differently, if it is ever of any use, will you send for me?"

And she whispered "Yes!"

It was impossible to hide from Lady Merton all that had happened, and she would have been very angry but that she deemed it inexpedient to quarrel with a young lady who was still an heiress; and so life was not quite so pleasant as it had been at Meadowview, and May was very glad to write to Mrs. Anderson, and fix the 1st of July for her return to Clapham. The answer was prompt and affect-

tionate—they would be delighted to have her; her uncle would meet her at Vauxhall.

But it chanced that Mr. Anderson was unusually busy, and chancing to run across Keith Foster, he begged him to go in his stead. The physician did not quite like the errand, but his consulting hours were over, and he had no excuse, so he agreed with the best grace he could muster.

It was certainly a shock to May to see him waiting for her; but she was too proud to be anything but composed. She pointed out her luggage in silence, and followed him to Mrs. Anderson's brougham, which had been sent from Clapham.

"I hope Marion is well?"

It was her first attempt at conversation.

"Perfectly," and he smiled. "We have most rapturous accounts from them. I wish you had stayed to see my brother, Miss Graham; I think you would admit he is worthy even of Marion."

"Your brother?"

"You surely knew that Marion married my brother Henry?" he asked, in surprise.

"I thought she had married you," said Miss Graham, bluntly.

"May, you could not have thought that!"

"I did," persisted May. "You came to Clapham nearly every evening, and Marion always seemed delighted."

"Because she always hoped I should bring her news. A sailor's betrothed has an anxious life."

May remembered Marion's remark about her lover's profession, and understood it.

"Well," declared Miss Graham, "I daresay you think me very stupid, but I am sure it was most natural to fancy you and Marion were engaged; you were always coming."

"I did not come to see Marion."

"Well, you always devoted yourself to her!"

"Perhaps I was not allowed to devote myself to anyone else," in a low, dangerous whisper. Then, in his natural voice, "Have you enjoyed yourself?"

"Awfully!"

"And you are sorry to come back?"

"I shall be very glad to see my uncle and aunt."

"I suppose you will not stay long?"

May was conveniently deaf.

"We have not known each other very long," said the doctor, gravely; "and, latterly, I know you have had no very kind thoughts of me; but I can never forget that we once seemed near each other. Surely, Miss Graham, you have punished me enough for my presumption, and will accord me a friend's privilege!"

In her heart May wished he would repeat his presumption.

"What is a friend's privilege?"

"To congratulate you on your engagement."

"I am not engaged!"

"Sir Cecil Graham's wishes are no secret."

"Well, I am not engaged to him; and I don't mind telling you that I never shall be; there is no more chance of it than there is of your marrying my cousin Marion."

"You have taken good care to prevent my marrying anyone," he said, sadly. "Oh! May, what an idiot I am. I know you can be nothing to me, and yet the very thought that this engagement is not formed—that you are still free—makes me unutterably happy."

"Does it?" said May, demurely. "Well I expect I shall be free all my life, Dr. Foster; if people cannot look over a mistake I shall certainly be free all my life."

"May!"

"I am nothing to you," she said, with a kind of choked sob in her voice; "you said so just now—you know you did."

"You are my heart's best love!" he answered.

"It rests with you whether you are the whole world to me, my darling."

"You can't expect me to beg your pardon for saying no," said May, wittily. "You know you can't, and you are always unkind to me now."

"May, will you say 'Yes,' now? Will you

take away the sting of all the cruel things you have said to me by one touch of your lips?"

"I don't know," answered May. "You have made me very miserable; I have had to stay away from my home all the summer just because I didn't want to go to your wedding."

"I shall never have a wedding unless you are there. Then you really cared a little, May?"

"I cared a great deal," she whispered. And then and there a great content filled Keith's heart.

They were married in the autumn—in the bright September days; and long before that the Andersons had learned the true reason of May forsaking them because of Marion's wedding.

"If you had only asked a question, you foolish child, we could have set everything right."

It was a very different wedding from the one planned a year ago, but a very pretty one.

May showed herself very superstitious—not even a bow of ribbon that had appeared in the first trousseau would she suffer to make part of this. She wore a white silk dress with a string of pearls round her neck—pearls fit for a king's ransom, which Sir Cecil himself had collected during his travels in the East.

The baronet came to the wedding a self-invited guest, and claimed the right of giving away the bride. One or two among the spectators guessed his secret, and appreciated the generous motives that brought him there. As May's guardian he had to explain her wealth to her husband; and though Keith Foster had never wished to marry an heiress, he owned it was but just that Sir John's money should be restored to his only child.

The Mortimers went down hill very rapidly. Carefully as Sir Cecil kept the banker's secret it oozed out, and people gave the cold shoulder to a man who could rob his benefactor's only child.

Dr. and Mrs. Foster mingle in fashionable circles when his professional duties afford him leisure for social pleasures; and it is the opinion of the world at large that never was seen a happier, more devoted couple.

Here this, in the mazes of the dance, May has touched hands with Lord Carlyon; ere this, at a flower-show, she has found herself in company with his unhappy, neglected wife; and at such moments a rush of thankfulness has filled her heart that fortune's frown saved her from the wretchedness of Lady Carlyon's fate.

One regret she has, and one only. Her cousin Cecil, her husband's devoted friend, their most frequent visitor, is still a bachelor. Ladies have smiled in vain upon him. Meadowview and the Yorkshire estates are still without a mistress, for the baronet has never avowed from his first choice. But for even this time may hold a remedy. There is a little girl in the Doctor's nursery with large, velvety brown eyes, and bright, vivacious spirits, who already recalls the May whom Lord Carlyon met in the gardens of Meadowview. Wise people say that this child is destined to atone to Sir Cecil for the grief her mother innocently caused him.

It may be so, it may not. It lies in the future, for Keith's first-born is barely nine years old. Of course it would be a brilliant position for the little May; but her parents have but one wish respecting their child—it is that, if she is ever married, she may, like her mother, be wedded for love only!

[THE END.]

"MADAME" is preparing about half-past ten p.m. to go out "for the evening," as she is accustomed to do, rather too frequently to please "Monsieur," who has made up his mind for the fiftieth time to assert himself. The following dialogue ensues:—Monsieur: "Where are you going, my dear?"—Madame: "Where I please."—"But when will you be back?"—"When I choose, sir."—"Ah, yes! of course; but no later; I should not permit that."

PACETTE.

A MAN took his seat in the barber's chair; he asked the barber if he had the same razor he had used two days before. Being answered affirmatively, the patient man said: "Then give me chloroform!"

An old bachelor recently gave the following toast: "Women—the morning star of infancy, the day star of manhood, the evening star of age. Bless our stars, and may they always be kept at a telescopic distance!"

Two Irishmen were lamenting over the illness of a friend who had been much brought down of late. "It's dreadful wake he is and thin; he's as thin as the pair of us put together!" one of the sympathizers observed.

An ARTIST who was recently engaged in depicting some Highland scenery was suddenly subjected to the following severe criticism from a truthful native:—"Why, what a deal of doing your work do take, sir; and when it is done, why, what is it?"

"WELL," remarked a young M.D., just from college, "I suppose the next thing will be to hunt a good neighbourhood, then wait for something to do, like 'patience on a monument.'"

"Yes," said a bystander, "and it won't be long after you begin before the monuments will be on the patience."

ARRY was at an hotel of the cheap order and saw the following notice posted on the walls:—"Breakfast 9 a.m." He said to the waiter: "Breakfast and some 'am," to which the waiter responded: "We've no 'am."—"No, 'am!" exclaimed ARRY, pointing to the notice, "no 'am! What's that?"

"WELL, Tom," said a blacksmith to an apprentice, "you have been with me now three months, and have seen all the different points in our trade; I wish to give you your choice of work for a while." "Thank'ee, sir." "Well, now, what part of the business do you like best?" "Shutting up shop and goin' to dinner."

The obliging visitor, to show that he is really fond of children, and that the dear little one is not annoying him in the least, treats the kid to a ride upon his knee. "Trot! trot! trot! How do you like that, my boy? Is that nice?" "Yes, sir," replies the child, "but not so nice as on the real donkey, the one with four legs!"

THE LATE Dr. James Hamilton was once sent for by a lady of fashion to see her favourite monkey, which had gorged itself at breakfast. On entering the room, he observed her ladyship's only son most absurdly dressed, and looking first at the child, and then at the monkey, coolly inquired, "My lady, which is the patient?"

ONCE upon a time a woman died; and as the mourners were carrying her to the grave they tripped against the stump, and let the coffin fall. She revived, having only been in a deep trance. Two years after she really died, and as they were carrying her down the same road, and neared the same stump, the disconsolate widower sobbed: "Steady, boys—steady; be very careful!"

A YOUNG gentleman paid his addresses to a young lady, by whose mother he was unfavourably received.—"How hard," said he to the young lady, "to separate those whom love has united!"—"Very hard indeed," replied she, with great innocence, at the same time throwing her arms around his neck, "and so mother will find it."

ANTI-VACCINATION.—A few days ago, in a school in a district we will call Lusatia, the master, after relating the story of the childhood of Moses, asked his boys: "Why was Moses hidden by his mother among the bulrushes?" An urchin replied in the most innocent tone, "Because his mother didn't want him vaccinated." The popular feeling against vaccination is very strong in Lusatia, and the child thought he was perfectly right.

SOCIETY.

THE Queen has ordered some photographs of picked men of the Seaforth Highlanders in groups and separately.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales have consented to attend an assault-of-arms, in aid of the Egyptian War Fund, which is to be held at the Albert Hall on April 16th.

THE site of the notorious Black Hole of Calcutta is to be marked by a monument erected by the Asiatic Society of India to the memory of those 146 British prisoners confined in the dungeon on June 20, 1756, when 123 of the number perished.

THE floral decorations at Earl Granville's Parliamentary banquet were exceptionally choice. The dinner table, at which nearly fifty peers were present, including His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge, was splendidly decorated with orchids, eucharis, lilies of the valley, narcissus, and other attractive plants.

APPROPOS of the Prince's visit to Cannes, a tale is told of a fair American, who made a bet that she would make H.R.H. do what she wished; seeing him standing by one of the roulette tables, she walked up and requested him to deposit a five-franc piece on the black for her, as she was unable to reach herself; this he did at once, and she returned to her friends in triumph to claim her winnings.

THE Egyptian War Fund Exhibition at Humphrey's Hall, Knightsbridge, was formally opened on the 14th Feb. last by H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge, in the presence of H.R.H. the Princess Mary, the Duke of Teck, and of a large gathering of representative persons. The exhibition, the proceeds of which were destined for the benefit of the families of the late war, is much more interesting than might at first be imagined, and consists of a great variety of objects gathered together during the late campaign. Amongst other things of note, we noticed Arabi's tent and the "sword which cut an Egyptian in two." It is paying Lady Jane Taylor not too high a compliment to assert that the success of the fund is mainly due to her indefatigable exertions and rare ability for conducting charitable enterprises of this description. Her ladyship has also been most ably seconded by the gallant captain who has kindly acted as secretary, and, indeed, by all concerned. It is to be hoped that the exhibition will be largely attended.

THE annual naval and military fancy dress ball, held at Brighton in aid of the local charities, came off a short time ago with much éclat, when about 300 guests were present. The pavilion was decorated in a novel and original manner, which was highly effective. The four staircases were arranged to represent the four seasons. A mass of flowers, such as roses, geraniums, &c., illustrated summer. A tiny pond of real water, fed by a trickling stream, and its banks surrounded with lilies of the valley, represented spring. Autumn was a mimic wood into which led a mossy pathway bordered with virgin oak; scattered leaves here and there gave the idea of fading foliage, and small trees with their leaves wholly or partially shed completed the idea. Winter was illustrated by an icebound pond, with its bank and approaches to it enveloped in snow, while the shrubs surrounding it were covered with hoar frost. Among the most effective costumes was that worn by Mrs. Eley, which consisted of a lemon-coloured satin skirt, over which was arranged a deep fringe of different sorts of natural seaweed, mixed with sea shells and branches of real coral; the bodice and papiers were also of seaweed, with revers of lemon satin fastened back with native oyster-shells; the epaulettes were of seaweed fastened back by lobster claws; the head-dress was also composed of seaweed and lobster claws.

STATISTICS.

SUGAR.—The production of beet-root sugar in Europe this year amounts to 1,920,000 tons, an increase of 137,500 tons over last year. Germany is still the greatest producer, heading the list with 675,000 tons; Austrian Hungary ranks next with 450,000 tons; France third, with 410,000 tons; Polish Russia fourth, with 275,000 tons.

THESE are now published in the United Kingdom, according to the *Newspaper Press Directory*, 1,962 newspapers, distributed as follows:—England—London, 886; Provinces, 1,144—1,530; Wales, 75; Scotland, 164; Ireland, 152; Isles, 21. Of these there are—187 daily papers published in England, 4 in Wales, 22 in Scotland, 16 in Ireland, 2 in British Isles. On reference to the first edition of this useful directory for the year 1846 we find the following interesting facts—viz., that in that year there were published in the United Kingdom 551 journals; of these 14 were issued daily—viz., 12 in England and 2 in Ireland; but in 1888 there are now established and circulated 1,962 papers, of which no less than 181 are issued daily, showing that the press of the country has more than trebled during the last five years. The increase in daily papers has been still more remarkable; the daily issues standing 181 against 14 in 1846. The magazines now in course of publication, including the quarterly reviews, number 1,311, of which 326 are of a decidedly religious character, representing the Church of England, Wesleyans, Methodists, Baptists, Independents, Roman Catholics, and other Christian communities.

GEMS.

GRATITUDE, says some one, is the memory of the heart.

OTHER men's sins are before our eyes, our own behind our back.

SYMPATHY for the poor doesn't lift them up, Only full sacks stand on end.

RELIGION is the final centre of repose; the goal to which all things tend.

THERE are many people whose whole wisdom consists in hiding their want of it.

NOTHING from man's hand, nor law, nor constitution, can be final. Truth alone is final.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

RICH BATTER CAKES.—Take a pint of boiled rice, mash it well, add three well-beaten eggs, a quart of milk, a little salt, and enough flour to form a batter. Add a teaspoonful of home-made yeast. When light, bake on a griddle.

MILK SOUP.—Four large potatoes, two leeks, two ounces of butter, three tablespoonfuls of crushed tapioca, one pint of milk. Put the potatoes and leeks, cut in four, into a saucepan, with two quarts of boiling water and the two ounces of butter, a teaspoonful of salt and pepper to taste. Boil an hour, run through a colander, and return it to the saucepan; add the milk, sprinkle in the tapioca, and let it boil fifteen minutes.

POUND CAKE.—One pound of butter, one pound of loaf-sugar, one pound of eggs, one and a quarter pounds of flour. Put the butter into a clean pan, about milk-warm, and stir it round until it becomes cream; then add the sugar, which must be pounded very fine, and stir them together for a few minutes. Break the eggs in, and beat them all together for five minutes; then gradually add the flour and six drops of essence of lemon; stir them lightly together, put in a buttered mould, and bake in a cool oven. This cake is good, but plain. If a richer one is desired, put in one pound of currants, half a nutmeg grated, and one quarter-pound of candied lemon, cut into thin slices.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A SEARCH for the body of Sir Francis Drake is to be made by the British Squadron belonging to the West Indian and North American stations, which during its coming cruise will visit Puerto Cabello. Off this port nearly three centuries ago the gallant explorer was buried at sea in a leaden coffin, and every effort will be made to recover the coffin.

A ONE-LEGGED Yankee orator named Jones was pretty successful in bantering an Irishman, when the latter asked him: "How did you come to lose your leg?" "Well," said Jones, "on examining my pedigree and looking up my descent I found there was some Irish blood in me, and becoming convinced that it had settled in that left leg I had it cut off at once." "Be the powers," said Pat, "it would have been a better thing if it had settled in your head."

THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON'S STATUE.—The First Commissioner of Works proposes to appoint a committee to inquire into and report upon the subject of the most eligible site for the statue of the Duke of Wellington, now being removed from the place where it has stood for thirty-seven years at Hyde Park Corner. The following have agreed to form the committee:—Viscount Hardinge, Sir Frederick Leighton, Mr. James Fergusson, Mr. Boehm, Mr. Miford, and the Duke of Wellington. The sites which will be chiefly brought under consideration are,—a spot within the new grounds now being laid out near Hyde Park Corner; a position in St. James's Park, opposite the Horse Guards; and one in Hyde Park, opposite the Knightsbridge Barracks.

SCREENS.—How to furnish fireplaces during the summer season is an ever-recurring problem. There remains the Japanese umbrella with its short handle which hides the objectionable space by being opened and placed before the grate. Newer than these umbrellas are immense Japanese fans manufactured for the purpose. These are spread and set in ebony standards in front of the fireplace. They come in great variety of patterns, and are made of paper, muslin, and silk. Another arrangement consists in hanging from a pole, fitted under the mantel by means of rings, a curtain of plush, velvet or prettily decorated cloth to fall in front of the fireplace. In many country houses the grate is filled with odorous evergreens, or a vase of flowers stands before it.

WRITING MATERIALS.—In olden days, many were the expedients resorted to by the scribes for writing materials. There was no scribbling paper whereon to jot down trivial memoranda or accounts, but the heaps of broken pots and crockery of all sorts, which is so abundant in all Eastern towns, proved the first suggestion for such china tablets as we now use, and bits of smooth stone or tiles were constantly used for this purpose, and remain to this day. Fragments of ancient tiles thus scribbled on (such tiles as that whereon Ezekiel was ordered to portray the city of Jerusalem) have been found in many places. The island of Elephantine, on the Nile, is said to have furnished more than a hundred specimens of these memoranda, which are now in various museums. One of these is a soldier's leave of absence, scribbled on a fragment of an old vase. These rough notes now possess wondrous interest to the finder. Still quainter were the writing materials of the ancient Arabs, who before the time of Mohammed used to carve their annals on the shoulder-blades of sheep; these "sheep-bone chronicles" were strung together, and thus preserved. After a while sheep's bones were replaced by sheep's skin, and the manufacture of parchment was brought to such perfection as to place it among the refinements of art. We hear of vellums that were tinted yellow, others white; others were dyed a rich purple, and the writing thereon was in golden ink, with gold borders and many-coloured decorations.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

TOM B.—A pretty and expressive face.

FRANCY MAPLETON.—We never give private addresses.

AMINA.—The name Emma means a nurse.

S. B.—Pay no attention to his promises. He is not to be relied upon.

ELIDA.—The Italians were the first pawnbrokers in the modern sense.

S. D. F.—Take no notice of the anonymous letters. Whoever wrote them was no friend.

L. M. J.—The "doit" was a silver Scottish penny, of which twelve were equal to a penny sterling.

I. Y. B.—The shepherd's dog is considered by Buffon to be the "root of the tree."

M. D. R.—It is stated that the Carthaginians were the first to pave their towns with stones.

EMMA.—The letters R. S. V. F. stand for the French *Répondez s'il vous plaît*. "Reply if you please."

DORINE.—Navy blue piped with cardinal would suit you, and be fitted for the purpose.

D. S.—You require a tonic, plenty of exercise, and a little hard work.

R. N.—1. The indentures require a half-crown stamp 2. A will does not require a stamp.

ALLOE.—The last licensed Court jester was in the reign of Charles I.

JERRY F.—The first obelisk mentioned in history was that of Ramesses, King of Egypt, about 1485 B.C.

P. S. L.—One-pound notes were originally introduced by the Bank of England in 1797.

X. X. X.—Opium is the juice of the white poppy. It is largely used in India and China as a sort of intoxicant.

M. R.—The Divorce Amendment Act was passed in July, 1868.

ADINE.—Touch the wart every morning with nitric acid, but be careful not to touch the surrounding skin.

D. N. S.—The great Napoleon was banished to St. Helena, an island in the Atlantic.

W. B. R.—In the language of flowers the moss rose means "pure love."

G. B. T.—The apprentice cannot free himself until his apprenticeship has expired, or he has come of age.

JULIE.—The young man has probably no intention of proposing to you. It will be as well to be as reserved as possible.

W.—If the firm has broken the contract they are not entitled to any percentage, but all depends on the wording of the agreement.

MELINDA.—In the language of flowers the crocus means "youthfulness," the snowdrop "confidence in the future," marigold "jealousy."

S. J. R.—The Holy Maid of Kent was Elizabeth Barton, who caused a revolt in the reign of Henry VIII. She was hanged in 1534, at Tyburn.

MERCIE.—It is allowable to assume white for a wedding, no matter how deep the mourning may be which one is wearing.

CORRIE.—An unmarried lady who has no older sister unmarried has "Miss" on her cards without her initials or her Christian name.

SAM S.—You are a yearly tenant, and entitled to six months' notice terminable at the date when you took the house.

S. L.—The nails should not be pared or cleaned with scissors, but with a sharp penknife. The best time to do so is immediately after washing the hands.

TOM.—1. Devote your leisure to informing your mind by a study of the best authors. Biography and history would do very well to commence with. 2. Writing good, but not regular enough for a merchant's office.

P. B. L.—1. Martinmas is the 11th of November. The high sheriffs of England and Wales are nominated on the morrow of St. Martin, 12th November. 2. Candlemas Day is the 2nd February, called also the Purification.

LAURA.—Silver ornaments are very much in vogue, and there is nothing more dressy unless you wear very expensive jewellery than a good solid silver necklet with a locket or cross.

J. H. W.—If you have accepted an invitation to dinner, and illness or some mischance makes it impossible for you to be present, be sure to inform your hostess of the fact as soon as it is possible to do so.

LALAGE.—Dress should always be simple, elegant, and becoming, without being too expensive for the wearer's pocket, and absurd fashions should not be worn by persons of sense.

S. L. D.—You are not now legally compellable to pay the loan, but if you have one spark of manliness or right feeling you ought to do so at once, as your means have now so thoroughly improved.

LITTLE WIFE.—Ham omelet is easily and quickly made and relishes well; beat four eggs till quite feathery, then add three large spoonfuls of finely-minced ham; butter the frying-pan well, and pour all in; when well set, roll up all like a jelly roll, and serve immediately. A steady and moderate fire is always necessary to make a nice omelet.

LILY.—1. The name George means "a husbandman"; Alice, "noble"; Dora, "a gift"; Jessie, "a graft." 2. Use glycerine for your hands—rub it well over them at night.

R. T.—We do not know of a book of fashions especially for hair-dressers and wig-makers. The various fashion periodicals usually devote a certain amount of space in each number to styles of wearing the hair.

C. M. W.—An advertisement of the kind sent cannot be inserted in these columns, they being devoted entirely to the answering of questions, and imparting useful information to our correspondents.

KATIE.—1. When a young man is going to escort a young lady to a party he will call at the time appointed for the entertainment, and the lady should be ready to start and not keep the gentleman waiting. 2. The lady should be the first to suggest going home.

P. L.—At private dances a lady should not decline the invitation of a gentleman to dance, unless she is previously engaged, or does not intend to dance the dance. To do otherwise would be a tact reflection upon the master and mistress of the house.

J. R.—1. The Dogger-bank is in the German Ocean. It was the scene of a gallant but indecisive battle between the British, under Admiral Sir Hyde Parker and the Dutch, August 5, 1781. 2. Handwriting fair, but not well formed.

STUDENT.—1. The connection of the Mortimers with the throne of England is very complicated. Consult the "Students' Hume," by Dr. William Smith. 2. Louis Philippe was not called King of France, but King of the French.

WASTE NOT THY LIFE.

Waste not thy life on doubts and fears
But do the work before you,
As though there were no future years
To cast a shadow o'er you.
The seed is sown, and let it go,
Now is the time to labour;
Work hard, and if thou canst, bestow
Help on thy needy neighbour.

O'er hills which may thy path beset,
When thou hast lost thy power,
Thou hast no time to fume and fret
While youth is still thy dower.
The sun will shine and clouds will come,
And nature alter never,
Long as this earth remains thy home,
So do thy best endeavour.

Fear not thy fate—fear not to die—
For how canst thou arrange it?
The end was fashioned from on high.
No power on earth can change it.
Work while 'tis day, cast fear away,
Till comes life's peaceful even;
Let conscience guide thine acts away,
And leave the rest to Heaven.

F. S. S.

CANDIDA.—Brush your hair well every day, and be sure you keep it scrupulously clean. It should be cut regularly once every month. The simplest way of dressing it is the best, and be sure not to plait it too tight. The shade of the lock sent is what would be called a bright brown.

ELBA.—The deepest coal pits in the world are in the Lancashire coal fields. The Dunksfield pit is 2,004 feet vertical, with an incline on the dip of the coal 500 feet long; the Rosebridge pit, of the Wigan Coal and Iron Company, is 2,418 feet deep; the Pendleton pit, 2,135 feet.

CARRIE.—We do not know that there is any meaning to a lady wearing a ring on her thumb, as we never heard that it was customary for any one to wear rings on the thumb, and are of the opinion that it would look very awkward.

L. S. M.—To continue working with the needle when visits of ceremony are paid would be extremely discourteous; but when intimate friends are present, it is not necessary to lay aside any light kind of work which does not interfere with your conversation.

CLARA.—To make cheese sandwiches, take two-thirds of good cheese grated, and one-third of butter; add a little cream; pound all together in a mortar; then spread it on slices of brown bread; lay another slice over each; press them gently together, and cut them in small square pieces.

PERINE D.—1. Shannon is the name of a river in Ireland, which rises in a pond called the Shannon Pot, close to the base of Mount Cuilcagh, in the north-western part of County Cavan. 2. The British frigate *Shannon*, which captured the *Chesapeake* during the war of 1812, was named after the river in Ireland.

H. W. A.—Charcoal powder will whiten the teeth, but it should not be used often after twice a week. When you use it mix with it a little prepared chalk. Charcoal helps to preserve the teeth by absorbing the acid sometimes morbidly present in the mucus of the mouth, but it is apt to be gritty—hence the caution not to use it too frequently.

D. S. G.—For parsley and butter sauce melt one ounce of butter, and add to it a dessertspoonful of flour, salt, and white pepper to taste; stir on the fire for a couple of minutes, add a little more than a tumblerful of boiling water by degrees, and a small quantity of parsley, blanched and finely chopped; keep on stirring for five minutes, but do not let the sauce boil.

LISA.—The colour of the garnet is blood or cherry red; when mixed with black it passes into crimson and violet red, and when tinged with yellow into hyacinth red; it is also met with of a reddish brown colour, liver-brown, and black, also greenish black. It occurs in mass, disseminated, in angular fragments, or crystallized.

M. D.—There is nothing to be gained by groaning over the matter, and sitting idly with folded hands. Opportunities come most frequently to those who are up and about looking after something to do. Remember Longfellow's words:—

"Be not like dumb driven cattle,
Be a hero in the strife."

We cannot all be heroes, but every one can try to raise himself into a higher and better position.

LILY.—1. When a new neighbour moves into the place where you live, and you wish to make a first call, you will send in your card by the servant, and if the lady does not know you from the name on the card, you will, of course, introduce yourself. 2. You will not remove your wraps upon a first call, or at any ceremonious call. 3. A lady does not usually take a gentleman's arm when walking with him in the day-time, but she may do so if walking with him in the evening.

F. G. P.—1. You may receive a letter of introduction through the post stating that a family much esteemed by the writer are coming to reside near you, and requesting your kindly attentions to them. 2. It is your place to answer this letter directly, and express your desire to attend to the wishes of your friend; and then you should call immediately upon the family thus presented to your notice. 3. A neglect to do this would stigmatize you as an ill-bred person, and no subsequent civilities would efface the impression.

CARRIE F.—Being a thorough flirt is nothing to be very proud of. A girl may be lively, and, if she is heart-whole, be equally kind and agreeable to all her gentleman friends. But that is a very different thing from encouraging special attentions from gentlemen, and leading them to believe you are fond of them, while all the time you are laughing at them and deliberately intend to throw them over as soon as a fresh fabley comes in your way. Such conduct we hold to be contemptible, and unworthy any true woman.

S. J.—1. The peculiar practice of wearing engagement rings appears to have commenced with the Romans. 2. Before the celebration of their nuptials, there was a gathering of friends at the house of the lady's parents, to settle the articles of the marriage contract, when it was agreed that the dowry should be paid down on the wedding-day, or soon after. 3. On these occasions a luxurious entertainment was given, and at its conclusion the man placed a ring upon the third finger of the lady's right hand, because it was thought that a nerve reached to the heart. 4. This ring was considered a pledge of betrothal, and a day was then named for the nuptials.

M. J.—A superior table mustard may be made by adhering closely to the following receipt:—Take of the best flour of mustard two pounds; half an ounce each of fresh parsley, chervil, celery, and tarragon; one clove of garlic; twelve salt anchovies (all well chopped); grind well together; add one ounce of salt; sugar sufficient to sweeten, and enough water to form the mass into a thin paste by grinding in a mortar. When put into pots a red-hot poker is to be thrust into each, and a little vinegar poured upon the surface. This is one variety of French mustard. Common table mustard is made by mixing eight spoonfuls of flour of mustard with two of salt and nine of water. Make into a stiff paste, and adding six spoonfuls of water, again mix.

LAURA M.—We think that a lover who does not write when he is away, or even answer when written to, does not deserve to be received at all when he comes back, especially by a young lady who has had to wait for eighteen offers of marriage. When you see him next, unless he immediately makes offer number nineteen, you should tell him that as he has missed you so little in the past, he had better try to get along without you altogether in the future, and when the next young man asks you for your love, find out what his intentions are before giving it, and then whatever happens you will, at any rate, be able to score up one more offer of marriage.

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